

# DETAILS: Rafting

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Planning early is of the essence if you want to travel by boat through the Grand Canyon. About 29,000 people made their way down the Colorado River last year. Trips lasted from one to 25 days, in rafts, kayaks, dories and large motorized craft known as J-Rigs. Around 75 to 80 percent of the trips are commercial; the rest are authorized by private permits that are obtained through a lottery run by the National Park Service and must be applied for a year in advance. It's wise to book commercial trips months ahead of time; launch dates fill quickly, and most companies do not run trips during fall, winter and early spring. Peak season is from May 1 through Aug. 31.

**GETTING THERE:** Most commercial launches will shuttle passengers to put-in and takeout sites. The most common put-in is Lees Ferry, about midway on Arizona's northern border, just south of Utah. Diamond Creek, east of Lake Mead National Recreation Area, is a favored takeout. Both sites are within easy driving distance of Flagstaff. Some trips out of Las Vegas, closer to the western end of the Grand Canyon, offer helicopter flights to and from the river. *Western River Expeditions* (866-904-1160, <http://www.westernriver.com>), for example, has a three-day lower canyon fly-in trip for \$1,135 a person during high season.

For flight information, see the Details for the hiking story, Page P4.

**MY TRIP:** We had a private permit for 16 people for 16 days; for 2008, of the 2,304 people who applied, only 213 won permits. It costs \$25 to apply for the permit and \$400 more if you get one. You'll have a better shot at getting one if you're willing to go off-season. Check the Web site for *Grand Canyon National Park* (<http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/whitewater-rafting.htm>).

We contracted with *PRO* (Professional River Outfitters), which caters to private parties, for renting our rafts, providing meals and shuttling our vehicles from put-in at Lees Ferry to takeout at Diamond Creek. We paid \$1,046 a person, not including transportation to and from the canyon. Info: 800-648-3236, <http://www.proriver.com>.

**OTHER OUTFITTERS:** The park's Web site also lists commercial outfitters, including *AzRA* (800-786-7238, <http://www.azraft.com>), or *Arizona Raft Adventures*; it comes well recommended from people I know who have rafted with the company. It offers a variety of trips: paddle rafts, oar rafts, motor rafts and "hybrid" trips -- a mixture of those modes. The hybrids are great for parties with mixed abilities. Those who want to use their skills and daring can go on paddle rafts, while those who want to relax and have a relatively easy route through the rapids should consider a large motorized raft. A 16-day full canyon trip with a commercial outfitter, such as *AzRA*, can run a minimum of \$3,500 a person. *AzRA* also offers shorter trips, such as a six-day upper-canyon trip at \$1,800.

*Grand Canyon Dories* (800-346-6277, <http://www.oars.com/grandcanyon/dories>) is a good choice for people who would like their thrills in what the company calls "small, traditional and charmingly elegant" rigid boats. That elegance comes with a higher price than many commercial trips -- \$4,753 to \$5,193 for 15- to 18-day trips, or \$2,615 to \$2,770 for seven- to eight-day trips.

**OTHER INFORMATION:** For a *wiki* that's particularly helpful for do-it-yourselfers, check out [http://www.rrfw.org/RaftingGrandCanyon/Main\\_Page](http://www.rrfw.org/RaftingGrandCanyon/Main_Page). Tom Martin's "*Day Hikes From the River*" (Vishnu Temple Press) is a helpful guide. Martin has 30 years' experience boating and hiking the canyon, and his book is geared to routes accessible from the river. For other books about the canyon, check [http://www.bobspixels.com/kaibab.org/misc/gc\\_books.htm](http://www.bobspixels.com/kaibab.org/misc/gc_books.htm), which is great for browsing. -- *S.B.*

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