

A Drive Through Paradise

By Dr Jenny Lim

Three hours of easy driving from the artificial wonderland that is Las Vegas brings you to the natural wonder of Zion National Park. The jaw-dropping beauty of the National Parks in the Southwest, the convenience and relatively low price of renting a car, good roads with terrific scenery, and a wide choice of accommodations from budget to luxury, make these parks attractive destinations for the couple or family.

My husband Ron and I toured the Grand Circle Loop in ten days. From McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, we drove northeast to Zion National Park and stayed there for two nights. One could stay longer and not be bored, because every National Park has a visitor's centre manned by helpful staff who give advice on hiking trails and activities for the kids.

Our next stop was Bryce Canyon National Park to gawk at the Hoodoos, which are fascinating rock formations that can also be found in Cappadocia, Turkey. But nowhere in the world are they as abundant as they are in the northern section of Bryce.

From Bryce we took a long scenic drive, ending up in Moab, a quaintly charming town near the Canyonlands and Arches National Parks. En route we drove through Capitol Reef National Park, which was our second favourite park after Zion. Relatively unheard of, Capitol Reef is a "drive through" park of great beauty. It might have been a favourite since we both were aching after hiking in Zion and Bryce, and grateful for an easy way to appreciate this park.

Leaving Moab, we headed south toward Monument Valley, visiting the southern part of Canyonlands en route. Monument Valley has been the setting for more western movies than any other site in the United States. We stayed at the only hotel in the valley which was pricey but worth every cent to watch the sun rising and setting from one's balcony.

We left Monument Valley after one night and drove southwest to the amazing Upper Antelope Canyon. This slot canyon, carved from Navajo sandstone, has narrow passages with shafts of sunlight penetrating from above that make it a photographer's dream. We spent the night in Page near Lake Powell and the Glen Canyon National Park.

Due to time constraints, we skipped Glen Canyon. Instead, we drove three hours to the northern rim of the Grand Canyon which fortunately had not closed yet despite snowfall for the past

A Hoodoo, weathered by the elements, found in Bryce Canyon

It's clear how Arches National Park got its name



A river runs through it: Zion National Park



The desolate beauty of Monument Valley



Jenny is dwarfed by the rocky cliffs in Canyonlands

two nights. This part of the Grand Canyon is much more remote and less visited than the popular southern rim. We had visited the southern rim ten years ago after our Las Vegas wedding and decided to drive five hours non stop from the northern rim to check it out again. It was a bit of a shocker to see the crowds in the southern rim after having the parks relatively to ourselves. Needless to say, the Grand Canyon is awesome.

I hope this article will encourage readers to consider a scenic road trip to the National Parks of Southwest USA. **SMA**



Jenny Lim lives in North Florida where she works in the Urgent Care section of the Emergency Room. She is married to a commercial pilot. They have no kids.