



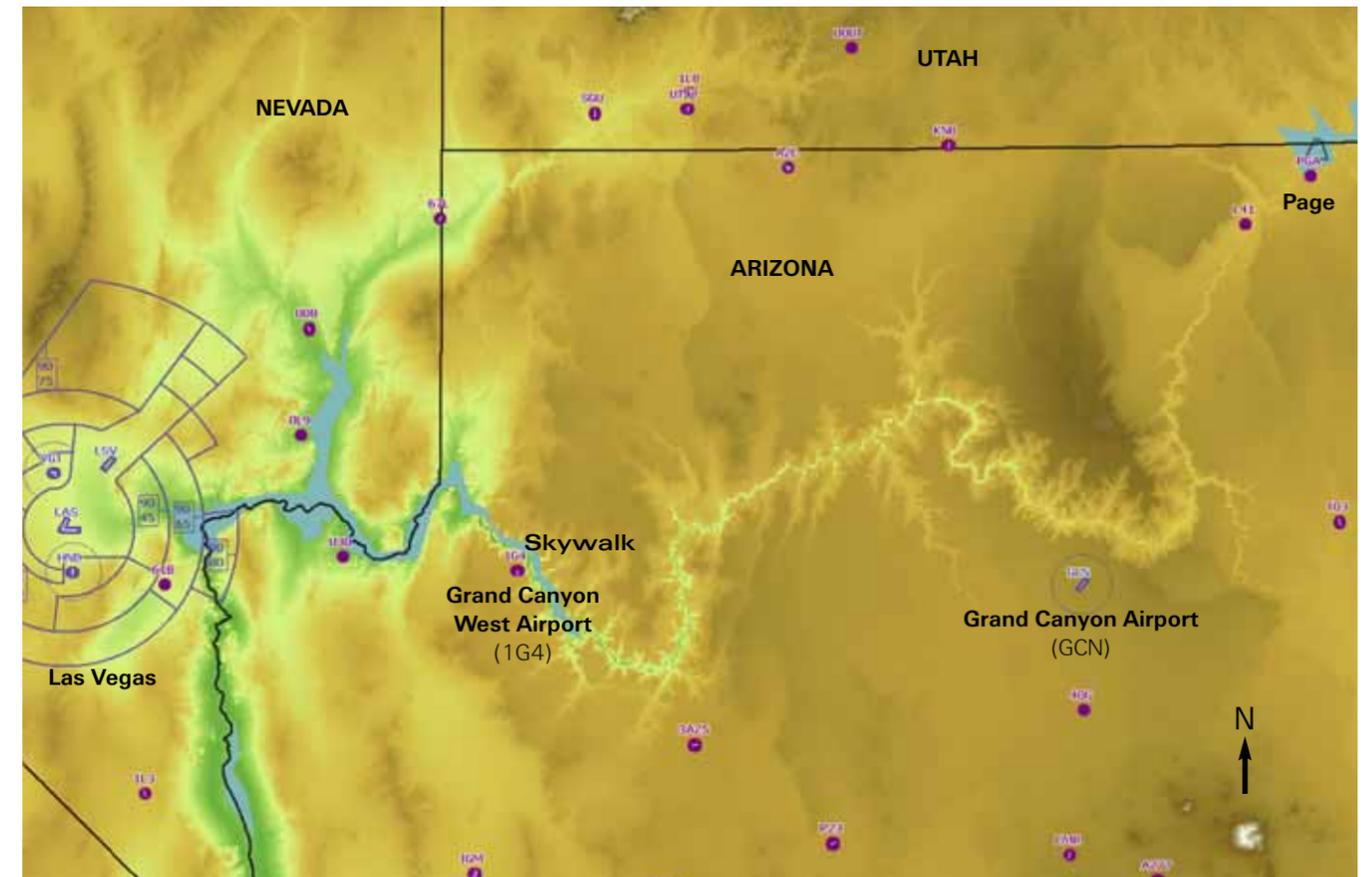
FLYSKYWALK

Soaring the Grand Canyon's New Suspended Path

Call it a geologic awe. Call it one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Call it great or gorgeous or glorious – a sight sent straight from God. The Grand Canyon is going to move you through exclamations of astonishment (or stunned speechlessness) to muse of marvels great and small. It is a canyon of grandeur: 277 amazing miles that wind around northern Arizona in a spectacle as much as 18 miles wide – 10 on average – and one mile deep that as the sun moves across the sky becomes a kaleidoscope of otherworldly pattern and hue. Two potent but opposing forces – the uplifting of the Colorado Plateau and downcutting of the Colorado River – have created countless canyons within canyons, each with a distinct geology, plants and animals. Massive cliffs made of limestone containing the bones of creatures that lived in long-gone seas; sandstone created from ancient desert dunes; shale beds of silt left by now-vanished rivers; and layers of ash, cinders and lava spewed by volcanic eruptions. And this: the ancestry of mountain ranges whose peaks two billion years ago towered over

a primitive land. Here the chasm carved by the Colorado River over the past six million years (laying bare rocks up to two billion years old – half of Earth's total lifespan) offers sights at times staggering to behold. Naturally, an experience this big demands to be lived by aircraft. However else to take-in the awe that stretches more or less from Lake Mead north to Lake Powell? To wing from, say, Las Vegas (LAS), over Lake Mead and along the Colorado as it flows through walls eroded to their current width by tributary streams, flashfloods, rockfalls, rain, ice, dust, wind and animal movements, is an adventure for true blue flying adventurers. Soaring with a specific destination in the log-book – this flight it's Skywalk, the newly opened \$30 million steel-and-glass cantilevered walkway that sits spectacularly suspended 4,000 feet above the canyon floor and extends 70 feet from its rim...well, this is an adventure for you.

What you will need: One, an aircraft, fast or slow. Two, a Grand Canyon Chart. Because some of the canyon, as a national park, has no-fly zones (typically found along the north side), it is



Map provided by Voyager Flight Planning Software

especially essential to be prepped with proper communication frequencies; helicopter sight-seeing tours also operating in *your* airspace demand your head's up as well. And three, all the excitement you can contain, if you even can. Flying the Grand Canyon is one of those major life events you always will remember. And to be among the first to visit Skywalk is sure to be an event. Owned by the 1,500-member Hualapai Native American tribe, the architectural spectacle is sited within the nation's million acres of land (100 miles of which border the canyon's western rim) at Eagle Point. Eagle Point is considered sacred by the Hualapai for, among other reasons, the area caves that entomb Native American soldiers killed in a history of conflicts.

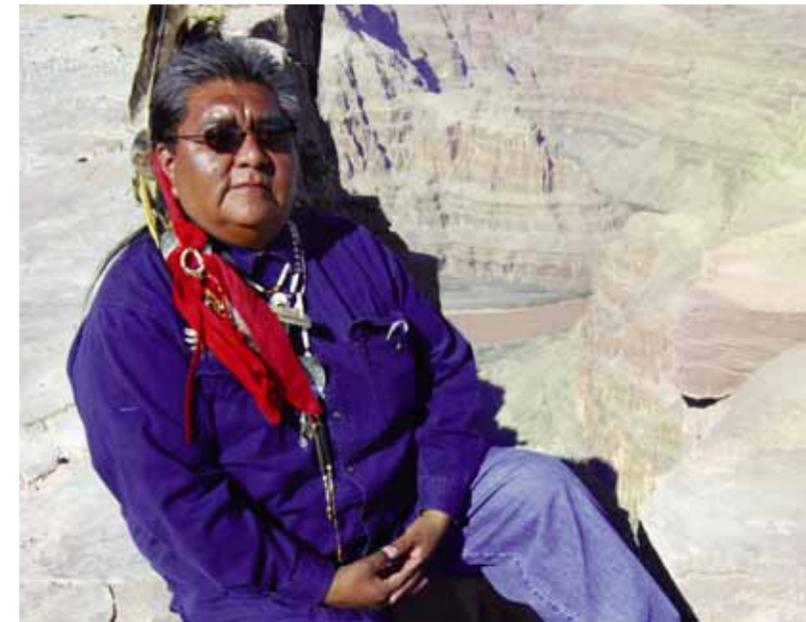
Fret not that your flight will require you get home in time for bed. Simply land at Grand Canyon West Airport (1G4) and let the Hualapai's Hualapai Ranch welcome you to an overnight filled with fun. This hub of west rim activity is gateway to whitewater rafting, off-road touring, hiking, fishing...and numerous Wild West themed activities at Hualapai Ranch. Bypass the motorcoach tour the ranch runs to the new walkway as well as to area fun-spots like Guana Point, popular for its absolutely spectacular Grand Canyon views. Instead, opt for a visit in *Flying Adventures* style: book a private tour by luxurious Hummer H2; ask for the guide of guides, a Hualapai named Wilfred Whatoname. Together you, Wilfred and the Hummer will get to Skywalk and fan-

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tastic canyon points beyond in the best of best ways possible.

So, really, it's settled. The only thing left to do is fly! Fly above Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the United States (twice the size of Rhode Island) for its 100-plus placid miles before you find yourself winging into the Grand Canyon via its ground orientation, the Colorado River. Follow the river as the walls of the gorge in your windscreen grow taller and taller, increasingly awesome. Above: the Colorado Plateau with its sagebrush and yucca, with its gloriously forested foothills of the San Francisco Peaks. The Kaibab, Prescott and Coconino National Forests are up there, of course, but the view is really found looking down...and down and down – two billion years' worth of down. Down all the way to the Proterozoic era, when the canyon's oldest layer, the Vishnu Schist, was formed in the days when the first bacteria and algae were just emerging. Layer upon layer upon layer – fly and gawk and possibly whisper a prayer of thanks to Theodore Roosevelt, who in 1903 first visited the canyon and declared it so precious it should be preserved for future generations as "...the one great sight which every American should see...." In 1908 the area won protected status as a national monument; the national park was created in 1919.



Opposite page: Nature's work of 6 million years, a kaleidoscope of pattern and hue; this page: Wilfred Whatoname and Skywalk's choice sightseeing vehicle, the Hummer.

4,000 feet above what looks like eternity and no plane beneath you for a feeling of safety

Fly and snap photos; fly and glimpse Havasu Canyon and its beautiful Havasu Falls; fly and note Grandview Point, the south rim's highest spot and likely the place from where the Spanish in 1540 had their first sight of something found nowhere else on Earth. Whether it is the enormous California Condors saved from extinction in the 1980s that frequently visit the south rim, or it is rustic Phantom Ranch lodge nestled on the canyon floor, or even Toroweap, the remote 3,000-foot cliffs of volcanoes and lava flows that recall the canyon's fiery past (here the views are particularly dizzying), just fly. All the way, if you like, to Lake Powell. The Grand Canyon as your heading is going to

wow you, big time. And if you *do* creep out along the horse-shoe-shaped Skywalk with its clear glass floor – 4,000 feet above what looks like eternity and no plane beneath you for a feeling of safety – remember: “It should be scary, but it should be really a feeling of floating out there,” says its architect, Mark Johnson of Las Vegas-based MRJ Architects. “It’s going to keep your attention.” Just like every great and gorgeous square inch of the glorious Grand Canyon itself. Happy flying!
Skywalk info (GrandCanyonSkywalk.com); for overnight accommodations at Hualapai Ranch (DestinationGrandCanyon.com). Both can be reached at (877) 716-9378. ✕



Opposing page: reclining woman on bridge's glass floor; Skywalk admired in profile (above) or from the air is within easy sight of Grand Canyon West Airport.



LET'S GO FLYING



By afternoon light the canyon so grand flaunts its full majesty.

Photograph by Michael Higgins

There can be nothing in the world more beautiful than...the Canyon of the Colorado...and our people should see to it that [it] is preserved for their children and their children's children forever, with the majestic beauty all unmarred.

– Theodore Roosevelt