

INSIDE



Variety and convenience

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert likes the outdoor recreation opportunities available in his state. "There's something here for everybody," he told a recent outdoor recreation conference in Salt Lake City.

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Not just a summer place anymore



Visitors have discovered Utah in the winter and are spending money in the state when some trails are closed and parking lots are empty. Above, a tourist enjoys the view of Zion Canyon from a window in its mile-long tunnel. At left, the sun sets on Mesa Arch — and the snow — in Canyonlands National Park.

The 'Mighty 5' in five days, a winter odyssey

On the road to Zion, Edward Abbey's "Desert Solitaire" pours from the car speakers, an adamant narration to my five-day, one-man tour.

The well-known author-environmentalist, however, almost certainly would decry my ambitious plan to hopscotch Utah's "Mighty 5" parks — Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and Arches — and label it an example of all that is wrong with "industrial tourism" and the passive "nature lurkers" who barely get out of the car, no less explore nature's wonders.

I make no excuses, however. I wanted to see the parks

in winter, when the day's angled light, often accompanied by snowfall, colors nature's portrait more with pastels than with oils. And I prefer empty parking lots. Barely 5,000 of Moab's 2.7 million annual visitors pass through the outdoor recreation hub in January.

A few closed roads and dormant campgrounds and trails might impede deeper exploration, but it seemed like a small price for more of Abbey's "Solitaire" solitude. (And just try photographing the North Window free of human silhouettes during July.) Would it be enough — touring one of the planet's most astounding winter land-

scapes while listening to this desert apostle's sermon — to reignite a traveler's devotions to the natural world?

Springdale, Zion's gateway settlement of motels, lodges and RV campgrounds, sits mostly vacant, if not exactly spectral, in winter (although I have to wait for a table at Oscar's Cafe that evening). I join a local photographer and head to the Angels Landing trail to capture the canyon at dusk.

Just five miles round trip, the walk demonstrates why length rarely indicates a hike's intensity as much as topography and temperature. Among the trail's features are Refrigerator Canyon, a segment so devoid of sun-



see **MIGHTY 5** page **F**



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'Something is going right'

Gov. Herbert cites 14 percent growth in outdoor recreation industry

Brice Wallace
The Enterprise

Variety and convenience.

Those two qualities make Utah's outdoors something special and have helped boost the state's economy, the state's top official recently said.

"I would say not only do we have the opportunity, because we have been blessed with a lot of great scenery and outdoor recreational opportunities, but the diversification that we have here is unique. It's not all the same. There's something here for everybody," Gov. Gary Herbert said at the recent "Summit" Outdoor Recreation Conference.

"We've talked about the fact that you can actually snow ski in the morning and golf in the afternoon. It is convenient. I call it 'convenient seclusion.' It doesn't take you long to get where you want to be, to be kind of away from the masses and from the urbanized parts of the state and into some secluded settings."

As for convenience, Herbert and tourism officials have for years lauded the fact that a person can land at Salt Lake City International Airport and be skiing within 45 minutes.

The combination of elements has worked in Utah's favor in recent years. Herbert noted that the outdoor recreation industry annually accounts for more than \$5 billion of the state's \$7.5 billion tourism industry. "So our tourism and travel is really tilted toward outdoor recreation," he said.

The state's "Mighty 5" marketing strategy — emphasizing Utah's national parks — has been a hit, helped by the fact that many international travelers put Utah on their travel agendas after the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. In fact, most of Utah's national park visitors are from outside the U.S.

More than 7.2 million people have visited those parks in the past two years, up 13.7 percent over historical figures. The number of skier days in Utah during the 2013-14 season totaled 4.2 million, making it the state's third-best season ever.

"I can't overstate the economic impact that outdoor recreation has had in our state for our tourism and travel efforts," the governor said.

Add to those figures the fact that the industry pumps more than \$1.2 billion into state and local tax coffers.

Herbert described the outdoors industry as having a strong ripple effect on the state's economy. For

example, a person buying a \$500 set of skis likely will also buy ski passes, spend a week on the slopes, eat at local restaurants and spend more money of ski accessories.

Those visitors come to Utah for camping, fishing, golf or other outdoor activities and then fall for the state's quality of life, prompting them to want to raise their families in the Beehive State. Sometimes those people are the leaders of companies that eventually have their operations, or at least part of their operations, move to Utah.

"One of things that we find as we talk to companies that are interested in coming here is that they are attracted by the quality of life that we have, and it really is a great selling point," said Val Hale, executive director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED).

"These companies and their employees are looking at these mountains, they see the ski resorts, they see the beauty of our canyons in southern Utah. They see all of these things and it's very appealing to them."

The number of outdoor industry-related companies coming to Utah also is on the rise, adding to the current base of 124,000 jobs connected to the industry, Herbert said. Vista Outdoor, a breakout company from ATK, is one

example. The \$2.3 billion company is based in Clearfield.

"The movement not only for enjoying the outdoor recreation but for companies saying, 'I want to be where the action is' and moving their headquarters or starting their businesses here in Utah, has been quite dramatic," Herbert said.

Being a state with a fast-growing population, Utah not only must seize on the economic development opportunities provides by its great outdoors, but also understand its responsibility to be good stewards of the Earth, Herbert said.

He has encouraged business, civic, industry, natural resource and environmental representatives to "see if we can't find a way to protect the iconic vistas and venues we have, allow for our farmers and ranchers to access water and grazing rights, and also develop some of our natural resources in an appropriate and responsible way."

"It's one of the best parts of our growing economy and it's growing dramatically," the governor said of the outdoors industry. "We see things growing at almost 14 percent. So something is going right in the state of Utah when you see the kind of expansion taking place in our outdoor recreation business."

Ski Resorts in Utah

Ranked by Number of Skiable Acres

Rank	Company Name Address	Main Phone Snow Phone Official Website	Skiable Acres	Number of Runs	Number of Lifts	Base Elevation	Summit Elevation
1	Powder Mountain Resort 6965 E. Powder Mountain Rd. (S.R. 158) Eden, UT 84310	801-745-3772 801-745-3771 powdermountain.com	7,000+	144	7	6,900'	9,422'
2	Canyons Resort 4000 Canyons Resort Dr., Park City, UT 84098	888-CANYONS 435-615-3456 canyonsresort.com	4,000	182	21	6,800'	9,990'
3	Park City Mountain Resort 1345 Lowell Ave. P.O. Box 39 Park City, UT 84060	800-222-PARK 435-647-5449 parkcitymountain.com	3,300	116	19	6,900'	10,000'
4	Snowbasin Resort 3925 E. Snowbasin Rd. Huntsville, UT 84317	801-620-1000 801-620-1100 snowbasin.com	2,830	104	9	6,450'	9,366'
5	Snowbird Ski & Summer Resort 9385 S. Snowbird Center Dr., Snowbird, UT 84092	801-933-2222 801-933-2100 snowbird.com	2,500	168	13	7,760'	11,000'
6	Alta Ski Area P.O. Box 8007 Alta, UT 84092	801-359-1078 DND alta.com	2,200	116	11	8,530'	10,550'
7	Deer Valley Resort 2250 Deer Valley Dr. S. Park City, UT 84060	800-424-3337 435-649-2000 deervalley.com	2,026	101	21	6,570'	9,570'
8	Solitude Mountain Resort 12000 Big Cottonwood Rd. Brighton, UT 84121	801-534-1400 801-536-5777 skisolitude.com	1,200	66	8	7,988'	10,035'
9	Brighton Resort 8302 S. Brighton Loop Rd. Brighton, UT 84121	801-532-4731 DND brightonresort.com	1,050	66	6	8,755'	10,500'
10	Beaver Mountain Ski Area 1351 E. 700 N. Logan, UT 84321	435-753-0921 435-753-4822 skithebeav.com	860	32	5	7,100'	8,800'
11	Brian Head Resort 329 Highway 143 Brian Head, UT 84719	866-930-1010 435-677-2035 brianhead.com	650	71	8	9,600'	10,970'
12	Eagle Point Resort 150 S. W. Village Circle Beaver, UT 84713	855-EAGLE-PT 435-438-3700 eaglepointresort.com	600+	42	5	9,500'	10,700'
13	Sundance Mountain Resort 8841 N. Alpine Loop Rd. Sundance, UT 84604	801-225-4107 801-223-4510 sundanceresort.com	450	42	5	6,100'	8,250'
14	Nordic Valley Ski Resort 3567 Nordic Valley Way Eden, UT 84310	801-745-3511 DND DND	110	22	4	5,400'	6,400'

Outdoor retail leader: Industry needs a more unified voice

Brice Wallace
The Enterprise

The leader of a specialty outdoor retailer wants the industry to speak with a unified voice delivering a “sharper” message.

Jerry Stritzke, chief executive officer and president of REI, which sells outdoor gear and clothing, stressed that that message need not be so negative.

“Across America, the public debate and dialogue is stuck,” Stritzke said at the recent “Summit” Utah Outdoor Recreation Conference in Salt Lake City. “Partisan politics often is about what you’re against. Government is characterized by gridlock. A lot of citizens are disengaging. Often, we see more finger-pointing and rhetoric daily as we watch the news.”

And that kind of environment affects the outdoor industry, he said.

“It doesn’t matter whether the discussion is over funding [or] creations of parks. They can all become heated. Land designations, whether it’s for development or recreation, and many of these other conversations end up resulting in nonproductive behavior.”

Instead, Stritzke said, the outdoors industry needs to coalesce and present positive messages about the “powerful, compelling and aspirational” elements of the outdoors.

“Even when you’re doing some-

thing that’s perceived as good, occasionally it can devolve into an adversarial conversation. I believe we need to enhance the narrative; to get over these divides, we need to supplement that conversation with two interdependent strategies,” he said.

“We need a better mechanism to engage our community in a grassroots, balanced, nonpartisan conversation. Second, we must broaden and sharpen our industry narrative to build a compelling case in alignment on what we stand, and the important

powerful statements of what we’re for, and it’s really just the tip of the iceberg when I think about what we advocate and the passion with which we advocate it. ... I think when we marry these compelling ‘for’ statements with our economic scale, we create the ability to drive the right kind of outcomes.”

As for economic scale, Stritzke cited statistics showing the financial wallop of the outdoors industry. In 2012, it accounted for \$650 billion of consumer spending and 6 million jobs

tive narrative. ... We need to show up as a broad community of businesses, large and small, of NGOs [nongovernment organizations], of government leaders, spread across Utah and across America, with millions of active supporters who enjoy the wonders of the outdoors.”

That community needs to push a nonpartisan, non-adversarial, results-focused, positive, more sophisticated dialogue that crosses political divides, he said.

“At the risk of stating the obvious, a dialogue grounded in what we are against feeds the current environment of gridlock and lack of progress. A dialogue grounded in what we are for creates the opportunities for forward progress, particularly when we look across the table and see those who are

there sharing those same values that we have in those ‘for’ statements,” Stritzke said.

“There’s no magic solution, but I’m convinced and I believe that, from my experience in trying to drive forward progress, that the more effective we are at articulating an inspirational ‘for’ position and then really building alignment around the fact that there’s an enormous amount of support for those ‘for’ positions, will allow us to make progress.

“I think, as an outdoor industry, it’s really important for us to land there and not get hung up in being ‘against.’”

“We need a better mechanism to engage our community in a grassroots, balanced, nonpartisan conversation.”

word here is, ‘for.’”

For example, he said, the industry is for life-changing, inspiring experiences that connect people to the outside; creating rewarding jobs that make those experiences possible; enabling healthy lifestyles; giving communities access and places to play; and actively working to have a healthy planet.

“As an industry, we need to deliver and we can deliver a more powerful ‘for’ narrative,” said Stritzke, whose company has stores in Salt Lake City and Sandy and 98,000 co-op members in Utah.

“It’s hard to disagree with these

were connected to the industry nationwide.

But those measures are not “representative of our real appeal and, in fact, our broader appeal,” he said. The industry actually is almost an antithesis of big business and lacks the political action committee funding and other tools that big business uses to affect public discourse, he added.

The industry is not reaching its full potential and needs to tap into its “powerful grassroots quality,” he said.

“I believe we can achieve so much more if we network together better as a grassroots community and if we hone and disseminate a more compara-

Will Utah's 'land grab' hurt the outdoor retail industry?

Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt recently slammed Utah’s push to seize control of federal lands as a radical measure that threatens the outdoor recreation industry, which brings a lucrative gear show to the state twice a year.

Babbitt’s comments came during a speech to a group of outdoor recreation company representatives in Salt Lake City for the biannual Outdoor Retailer Show that met in January.

“Our public land heritage really is under attack,” said Babbitt. “We’ve really got a crowd of uninformed, misguided politicians who are attempting to dismantle or abolish public lands and the agencies that administer them.”

Babbitt’s remarks are the latest indication Utah’s political posturing on the issue could affect its relationship with the outdoor recreation industry, which supports the retailer show that brings an estimated \$40 million in economic benefits to the state each year.

Organizers already have been con-

sidering moving the show to another city after its contract with Salt Lake City ends in 2016. They’ve said they want to stay in the state, but a lack of hotel rooms and convention space is problematic.

Outdoor Retailer spokeswoman Kate Lowery said the state’s land transfer law isn’t impacting their decision, but she added the industry wants access to Utah’s pristine lands.

In his speech, Babbitt urged outdoor recreation businesses to flex their growing muscle — consumers spend an estimated \$646 billion a year in the industry — and work to ensure the nation’s public lands aren’t sold off or developed.

“This is the moment to come together, stand tall, raise your voice, put your industry into the fight,” Babbitt said. “It will make a real difference.”

A deadline Utah set for the federal government to hand over 31 million acres of public land passed in February

with no such transfer, something predicted by both critics and supporters. Utah has said it would be a better land manager and that local control would allow the state to make money from taxes and development rights.

U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell says it’s a waste of time to debate whether Utah will take over the land. Utah Republican leaders are laying groundwork to push the issue in court, though it’s unclear when the state might file a lawsuit.

Babbitt, who served as interior secretary under Pres. Bill Clinton from 1993 to 2001, said the law is a conduit so public lands can be served up to the coal, oil, gas and mineral industries for exploitation.

About 22,000 people attended the Outdoor Retailer Winter Market, a business-to-business expo that allows store owners to meet with manufacturers and preview products that will reach the retail market soon. Before

announcing in 2013 it would extend its Utah contract through next year, show organizers threatened to move the event if the state didn’t demonstrate a commitment to preserving public lands.

Herbert issued a report last year laying out a broad-stroke plan to preserve Utah’s natural jewels and cultivate outdoor recreation as a pillar of its economy. He has also created an office devoted solely to outdoor recreation.

Those moves seemed to ease the industry’s concerns. But Utah’s continued push to control federal public lands plants new seeds of anxiety about its true intentions, said Peter Metcalf, president and chief executive of Salt Lake City-based Black Diamond Inc., an outdoor gear manufacturer.

“Are they really committed to supporting the natural and iconic landscapes that this outdoor industry is predicated upon?” Metcalf said. “This land grab sends the message that they’re not.”

Travel Agencies in Utah

Ranked by Total Sales in 2014

Rank	Company Name Address	Phone Web	Total Sales in 2014	% Business Travel % Vacation/ Leisure Travel	# of Offices in Utah	Number of Utah Employees	Specialties	President/CEO
1	Christopherson Business Travel 5588 S. Green St. Salt Lake City, UT 84123	801-327-7700 cbtravel.com	\$510 million	68% 32%	1	95	Business travel management & business travel technology	Mike Cameron
2	Hess Travel 150 N. Main, No. 200 Bountiful, UT 84010	801-292-8687 hesstravel.com	\$70 million	95% 5%	1	32	Business travel management	Mike Davidson, COO Alan Hess, CEO
3	Morris Murdock Travel 515 S. 700 E. Ste. 1B Salt Lake City, UT 84102	801-487-9731 morrismurdock.com	\$65 million	0% 100%	6	105	Cruises, guided vacations, LDS tours, meetings & incentives	Brian Hollien, President
4	Get Away Today 1650 E. 5700 S. South Ogden, UT 84403	855-GET-AWAY getawaytoday.com	\$60 million	DND 100%	1	50	Disneyland Resort, Hawaii, cruises, incentive travel	Chuck Smith, President & Julie Smith, CEO
5	Destinations Inc. 1194 S. Jordan Pkwy. Ste. B/C South Jordan, UT 84095	801-446-5000 destinationsinc.com	\$23.5 million	DND 3%	1	18	Incentive, meeting and event travel	Rick Lambert
6	Columbus Travel 563 W. 500 S. Ste. 180 Bountiful, UT 84010	801-295-9568 800-373-3328 columbusvacations.com	\$22 million	5% 95%	1	22	Corp. incentive groups & personal vacation/leisure	Mark Faldmo, President Larry Gelwix, CEO
7	Snelgrove Travel Centers Inc. 145 W. Gentile St. Layton, UT 84041	801-544-1800 snelgrovetravel.com	\$21.7 million	5% 95%	1	27	All inclusive vacations, ski vacations, cruises & international airfare	Richard Snelgrove
8	Cruise & Travel Masters 4376 S. 700 E., No. 200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84107	801-268-4470 cruiseandtravelmasters.com	\$18.9 million	40% 60%	1	45	Managing corp. & incentive travel, family reunions	Toby Nash
9	Clawson Travel 216 S. 1300 E. Salt Lake City, UT 84102	801-582-0303 DND	\$16 million	95% 5%	1	8	Business & international travel	Brad Clawson, CEO & President
10	Wren & Fida International 320 E. 900 S. Salt Lake City, UT 84111	801.364.4481 wfintl.com	\$10 million	90% 10%	1	10	Private co. incentive travel, intl. group travel, charters	Douglas Wren
11	Thomas Travel 535 E. 4500 S., No. D-200 Salt Lake City, UT 84107	801-266-2775 thomasttravel.com	\$5 million	15% 85%	4	10	Group, theater tours, leisure, cruises	Robert Guymon
12	Wycoff World Travel 3501 S. Main St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-487-5991 800-444-5991 801-487-5995 DND	\$4.5 million	65% 35%	1	3	Corporate & specialized personal	David Anderson
13	All Points Travel LLC 2751 Fort Union Blvd. Salt Lake City, UT 84121	801-466-1101 allpointstravelonline.com	\$2.2 million	2% 98%	1	3	Honeymoons, destination weddings, group travel & cruises	Marjorie R. Donoghue & Corina D. Johnson
14	A Travel Center 4376 S. 700 E., No. 221 Salt Lake City, UT 84107	801-523-8030 800-728-1506 yourvacationstation.com	\$2 million	0% 100%	1	DND	Family & group vacations	James Robert Svendsen



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Recreation Equipment Companies

Ranked by Total Gross Sales in 2014

Rank	Company Name Address	Phone Official Website	Business Category (RVs, Watercraft, Motorcycles, Etc.)	Number of Utah Employees	Number of Utah Locations	Gross Sales for 2014	Major Brands Carried
1	General RV Center 14295 S. Minuteman Dr. Draper, UT 84020	801-307-1070 generalrv.com	RVs	65	1	\$58 million	Prime Time, Forrest River, Keystone, Fleetwood, Tiffin
2	Sierra RV 1200 N. Main Sunset, UT 84015	801-728-9988 sierrarvsales.com	RVs	54	1	\$35 million	Evergreen Bay Hill and Amped, Keystone Denali, Aspen Trail
3	Parris RV 4360 S. State St. Murray, UT 84107	801-268-1110 parrisrv.com	RVs	26	1	\$18 million	Rockwood, Salem, Sandstorm, Columbus, Palomini, Gulf Stream
4	Utah Water Sports 11017 S. Jordan Gateway South Jordan, UT 84095	801-495-2400 utahwatersports.com	Watercraft/ towboat	14	1	\$15 million	MasterCraft
5	Plaza Cycle 1379 W. 3300 S. Salt Lake City, UT 84119	801-972-8725 plazacycle.com	ATV, watercraft, motorcycles, utility vehicles, side-by-sides, snowmobiles, slingshot, trailers, generators, snowblowers	25-30	1	\$10 million	Yamaha, Honda, Kawasaki, Polaris, Royal
6	Access RV 2240 S. State St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-936-1200 accessrv.com	RVs	25	3	\$7 million +	Cherokee, Grey Wolf, Flagstaff, Livin Lite, Arctic Fox, Palomino, Little Guy
7	Executive Boat & Yacht Brokerage 3733 S. Main St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-288-0545/ 801-550-2628 executiveyacht.com	Watercraft, PWCs, houseboats	7	1	\$4.6 million	Consignment; a variety of makes & models
8	Robertson Marine LLC 2033 S. Main St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-534-1111 robertson-marine.com	Fishing boats & motors	9	1	\$3.7 million	Ranger Boats, Crestliner Boats, Yamaha Outboard Motors, Mercury Outboard Motors
9	SS Marine Investments LLC 80 E. Pacific Ave. North Salt Lake, UT 84054	801-295-5999 ssmarineutah.com	Watercraft	14	2	Approx. \$3 million	Four Winns, Chaparral, Glastron, Epic, Sanger, Smoker Craft, Sylvan, Scarab
10	SLC Powersports 958 Jewell Ave. (1910 S.) Salt Lake City, UT 84104	385-290-1450 slcpowersports.com	Motorcycle	3	1	\$2 million	Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Kawasaki, Triumph, Harley-Davidson, Victory
11	Davidson Marine & Recreation 4730 S. 500 W., Ste. A Murray, UT 84123	801-262-4299 davidsonmarine.com	Watercraft, ATVs, snowmobiles	6	1	\$500,000	HydroSwift, Hyperion, Triumph, Montego Bay, Stingray
12	Camping World 13153 S. Minuteman Dr. Draper, UT 84020	888-533-8913 DND	RVs	150	3	DND	Jayco, Keystone, Forest River, Winnebago & Dutchmen
13	Honda Suzuki of Salt Lake 2354 S. State St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-486-5401 hondasuzuki.com	Motorcycles & power equipment	10	1	DND	Honda Powersports & Suzuki Powersports
14	Intermountain Harley-Davidson 2928 S. State St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-487-4647 utahharley.com	Motorcycle	91	5	DND	Harley-Davidson
15	Legacy RV Center LLC 3711 S. State St. Salt Lake City, UT 84115	801-265-3711 legacyrvcenter.com	RVs	8	1	DND	Heartland, Forest River, Crossroads, Gulf Stream, Dutchmen/Keystone
16	Marine Products Pro Shop 949 W. 1700 S. Salt Lake City, UT 84104	801-973-4017 marine-products.com	Boat, motor & watersports	20	1	DND	Moomba, Supra, Premier, Mercury, Yamaha, Indmar, Ronix, Radar, Alumacraft
17	Terry's RV Center Inc. 5545 S. State St. Murray, UT 84107	801-262-2486 terrsvrcenter.com	RVs, travel trailers, fifth wheels & campers	15	1	DND	Wildcat, Puma, Canyon Cat, Lance

MIGHTY 5*from page F1*

light that temperatures drop more than 10 degrees, and Walter's Wiggles, a series of 21 switchbacks that makes Lombard Street look like a stretch of Nebraska highway.

Angels Landing's notoriety has nothing to do with steep temperature drops or the 1,488-foot serpentine climb. What inks this hike into the "most dangerous hikes" almanac is the narrow neck, four feet wide with sheer cliffs on either side, that leads from Scout Lookout to the spectacular viewpoint.

A fixed chain guides the surefooted for the final half-mile, while newly converted acrophobes make a hasty retreat down the trail. How sharp is the knife's edge? Clint Eastwood shot portions of "The Eiger Sanction" off the West Rim Trail that connects to Angels Landing. We pause before entering Refrigerator Canyon, set up tripods and sidestep any decision to tiptoe across the neck.

Zion at first light

If sharp drops exist above Pine Creek on the Canyon Overlook Trail, I don't see them the next morning during my predawn scramble to photograph Bridge Mountain at first light. The half-mile path, though iced over along the initial staircase, leads to a wide vista to watch the canyon and East Temple rock warm to the sun's glow.

I return to the canyon floor later that morning, gear up in Zion Outfitter's dry suit for a hike from the Temple of Sinawaya up the Narrows, a section of the Virgin River that sets course between 10-story walls rarely more than 30 feet wide.

Frozen tears form upon the weeping slot canyon walls. I slosh against the knee-high current, occasionally testing my dry suit sealing technique to wade waist-deep in quiet side pools that disappear behind 5-foot-tall ice sculptures. I'll save the 16-mile descent into the Narrows from Chamberlain's Ranch for a considerably warmer day.

A visual ambush

After returning to Springdale to grab my gear from the Cable Mountain Lodge (and a Thai chicken wrap from Cafe Soleil), I re-enter Zion and travel Route 9 toward Bryce Canyon National Park, less than two hours northeast.

Most often, the first impression of Bryce is how the chasm appears out of nowhere. Visitors first enter a ponderosa pine forest, followed by pinyon pine and juniper stands. Then they

ascend the Inspiration Point Trail and, damn, the earth sharply falls 10 stories below, revealing a 36-square-mile amphitheater lit in shades of red and orange.

Hoodoos and fins, weathered forms chiseled from the 50 million-year-old Claron Formation by rain, wind, flood and extreme freeze/thaw cycles, populate the valley. I approach the Bryce rim four times during my visit, and each encounter surprises me. Geologic time conquers all comers.

The Bryce Canyon rim sits 9,000 feet above sea level, the only park of the Mighty 5 that receives reliable snow in winter, setting up a morning of Nordic skiing along the rim from Bryce Point to Fairyland Point. While perfectly safe for an intermediate



cross-country skier, skiing on the rim 1,000 feet above Fairyland Canyon stirs some of the adrenaline I usually associate with downhill.

Fairyland and Paria Point roads remain unplowed during winter to provide habitat for skiing and snowshoeing. The 2015 Winter Festival (Feb. 13-16) celebrates outdoor adventure with snowshoe hikes, astronomy workshops and a roster of other outside activities. No festival is required to enjoy another of Bryce's assets, one of the darkest night skies in the United States.

Nature and culture

On Scenic Byway 12, the 124-mile route across the Colorado Plateau linking Bryce Canyon with Capitol Reef National Park, I encounter fewer than a dozen oncoming vehicles.

The desolate highway rises to 9,636 feet above sea level, skirts Dixie National Forest and reveals several vistas of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, a 1.9 million-acre landscape of cliffs, mesas and canyons that stretches south toward Arizona's Grand Canyon.

Capitol Reef National Park is

the least visited of the Mighty 5 because of its isolation and lower visibility. The park received its status for the natural phenomena — the Waterpocket Fold, a 100-mile-long monocline, is among the longest in the world — as well as for its cultural significance. Paleo-Indian, Desert Archaic, Fremont and ancestral Puebloan aboriginals foraged and farmed this region dating back 12,000 years, some producing exquisite petroglyphs.

Light snow swirls above the mesas as I continue along Route 24 to Interstate 70 and Canyonlands National Park. Abbey favored Beethoven, the composer's fortissimo a rare match for the tenor of the wilderness. Cruising I-70 resonates quite differently for me, so I pause "Desert

This ephemeral canvas of the Mighty 5 teases subsequent visits, nowhere more so than in Canyonlands. I comprehend the previous three parks, but can hardly claim a glimpse into this 337,598-acre wilderness, nearly 100,000 acres bigger than Capitol Reef, the second-largest, and almost five times the area of Arches.

Entrance to Canyonlands' Needles section sits 100 miles south of the Island in the Sky portal. In a country where practically every hillock receives a name, sections of the Maze here remain largely unexplored. Even Abbey, worried that early-season snow might bring peril, exited the Maze prematurely.

Stars at sunrise

I wasn't prepared for Arches National Park.

"Desert Solitaire" rarely mentions the other Mighty 5 parks; I assumed Abbey's environmental treatise focused primarily on Arches because of his familiarity with the 76,679-acre park. That is, until the sun peers over the La Sal Mountains and focuses its glare upon the North and South Windows as the moon sets behind Balanced Rock. Like a redheaded statuette, Arches seizes my attention in a room teeming with wilderness starlets.

Early morning sunshine flares ignite the rocks, hoodoos, arches and fins that litter the high desert floor, lighting preternatural rouge and dimensions that stretch

beyond the familiar three. I can no more glance away when the sun coats Turret Arch than I can arrest my suddenly frenetic shutter finger.

Far from optical illusion, Arches obstructs vision. I force my eyes away from the Windows, but immediately confront Double Arch, more Matisse dance than sandstone impediment. Pushing past Double Arch, I battle between delving into the Cove of Caves and catching the last of fresh light on Balanced Rock. A debate rages: Hike to Delicate Arch or commit a couple of hours to Devils Garden, the 7.2-mile loop that avails the most arches per route in the park? I choose the latter.

Inevitably, I overthink the sunset, craving the capture of more landmarks than is physically possible during the economical winter sundown. I manage to catch soft light on the fins outside Sand Dune Arch, then dash back to witness the last decent rays retreat from the Windows as I enter the parking lot.

Luxury/Upscale Hotels in Utah

Ranked by Total Number of Guest Rooms

Rank	Company Name Address	Phone Official Website	Total Number of Rooms	Year Established	Amenities Available	General Manager
1	The Grand America Hotel 555 S. Main St. Salt Lake City, UT 84111	801-258-6000 grandamerica.com	775	2001	24-hour room service, business center with Internet, indoor lap pool, saunas, state-of-the-art fitness equipment, personalized concierge services	Bruce Fery, CEO
2	Zermatt Resort 784 W. Resort Dr. Midway, UT 84049	(435) 657-0180 zermattresort.com	329	2006	Spa, Bakeri & Eis Bakery, Z's Steak & Chop Haus, Matty's Bistro, Indoor/outdoor pool, mini-putt course, tennis courts, horseshoe, shuffleboard, ski center.	Nic Barger
3	Hotel Monaco 15 W. 200 S. Salt Lake City, UT 84101	801-595-0000 monaco-saltlakecity.com	225	1999	Nightly hosted manager's wine reception, valet parking, 24-hour room service, in-room spa services	Daryn White
4	Montage Deer Valley 9100 Marsac Ave. Park City, UT 84060	435-604-1300 DND	220	2010	True ski-in/ski-out access (winter season), summer activities center, 50,000 sq. ft. of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting space, spa	Allen Highfield
5	Stein Eriksen Lodge 7700 Stein Way Park City, UT 84060	435-649-3700 DND	180	1982	Spa, gameroom, two restaurants, full service ski valet, valet, concierge, 24-hour room service, fitness center, complimentary Wi-Fi, pool & hot tub	Dan Bullert
6	Waldorf Astoria Park City 2100 Frostwood Dr. Park City, UT 84060	435-647-5500 parkcitywaldorfastoria.com	175	2009	Year round outdoor pool & Jacuzzis, on-site spa, restaurant & bar, 24-hour room service, business center, valet parking, ski valet, ski-in access	Kerry Hing
7	The St. Regis Deer Valley 2300 Deer Valley Dr. E. Park City, UT 84060	435-940-5700 stregisdeervalley.com	172	2009	Outdoor heated infinity swimming, poolside service, restaurants & bars, retail & ski shops, spa, sauna & steam room, ski beach, ski in & out access to Deer Valley	Edward Shapard
8	Hyatt Escala Lodge Park City 3551 N. Escala Dr. Park City, UT 84098	435-940-1234 escalalodges.hyatt.com	150	2010	Ski-in & ski-out access, outdoor heated pool and hot tubs, underground valet parking, complimentary transportation to Historic Main Street	Claudia Wattenberg
9	Hotel Park City 2001 Park Ave. Park City, UT 84068	435-200-2000 hotelparkcity.com	100	2003	10,000 sq. ft. spa & fitness center, Ruth's Chris Steak House, year-round outdoor heated pool, 25,000 sq. ft. of function space	Ryan Overton
10	Amangiri Resort No. 1 Kayenta Rd. Canyon Point, UT 84741	435-675-3999 amangiri.com	34	2009	Restaurant, spa & fitness, hiking trails	Christophe Olivro



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MIGHTY 5

from page F9

Wagered one sunset

My plans to listen to Abbey's final chapter also fade when, for the first time in the 10-CD set, the disc skips. Surely the desert sage would never

permit his final sentences to broadcast from within one of these "sand-pitted, dust-choked iron dinosaurs." Chuckling, I pull over in the Garden of Eden, withdraw my softcover backup and begin "Bedrock and Paradox," "Desert Solitaire's" conclusion.

I discover that Abbey's own expectations to see this garden "all lit up in

evening light" on his final night also went awry, when a storm strewn with clouds obscured the sun's rays. He'd had months, of course. I'd wagered one day, one evening, one sunset. And a shorter winter day at that.

Feeling foolishly forlorn, I place the book beside me, start the dinosaur and prepare to exit the park. When I

look up, I see Balanced Rock black against the pastel sky. On the fifth night in the fifth of the Mighty 5 National Parks, I step back into the frigid air.

Crai Bower is a freelance writer in Seattle. He can be reached by email at craigb@FlowingStreamWriting.net.

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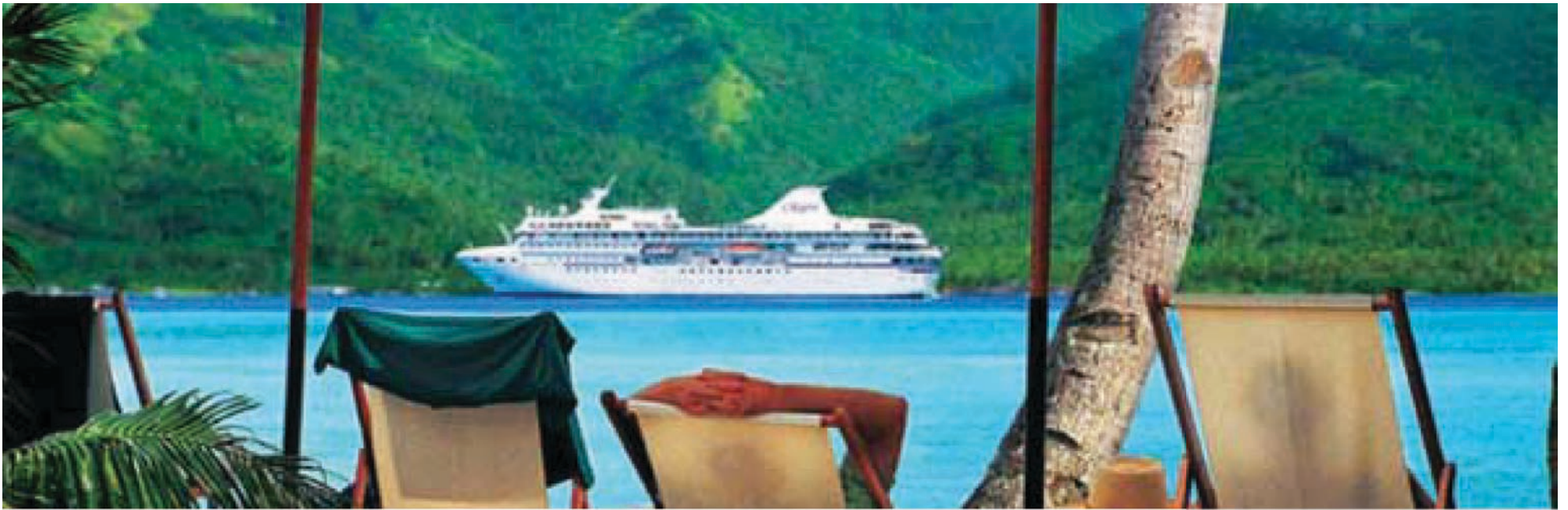
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