

# A visit to spectacular Antelope Canyon

By Annemarie Eveland

I stood awestruck, as I dug my feet into the sandy floor of the most photographed underground slot canyon in America. Like others of the group visiting Antelope Canyon, just outside Page, Arizona, I gazed upward in mesmerized wonder at the brilliant cascading streams of light and sand that poured down from high cracks of sculpted sandstone walls.

Ancient sand dunes had become twisted into carved formations of sandstone trapped in time. I felt this stunning splendor with a secret thrill and sacred serenity.

The Navajo consider the cathedral-like canyon a sacred and spiritual place. They treat it with reverence and respect, and they instruct visitors to honor and protect the site. One feels the mystical and mysterious there, even amid the large crowds visiting daily. In early times, prong-horned antelope roamed through the canyon to reach the river—hence, its name, “Antelope Canyon.” The Navajo call it “The place where water runs through rocks.”

It is mindboggling to comprehend how this canyon was carved, as a result of millions of years of extreme weather, flash floods, forceful rains and blowing wind—resulting in deep corridors with ever-changing colors and lights. During monsoon storms, water collects above in a basin, resulting in flash floods that race wildly through the canyon, shaping the petrified sand dunes into sandstone rock walls.

There are two parts to Antelope Canyon. We were on the Upper Canyon tour, with a required Navajo guide. The canyon has more light and is easily accessible, though more crowded.

Lower Canyon requires ladder climbing. The contrasting colors in corridors on the canyon walls are constantly changing with each moment of light, making the canyon walk a somewhat dreamy expe-

rience. Shafts of light and sand beams pouring down are both dramatic and breathtaking.

Wedge between rock formations at the top are huge logs, branches and twigs, which came crashing down the canyon in torrents of flash flooding. At one spot, our guide shouted into a low basin-like rock. His call echoed down the canyon. "Impressive" is a word that expresses the experience! The walls of the canyon appear as though fingers might have traced designs in soft beach sand, however, the substance is petrified sandstone.

In walking the sandy, loamy canyon bottom, every twist and turn tantalizes the mind and eye, challenging one to embrace the canyon's magic as it reveals a series of secrets.

I was struck by the beauty. I brought home unforgettable memories, along with a bit of grit in my teeth and sand in my eyes. Now, I know why I saw visitors wearing face masks and glasses! But I'm happy with my treasured memories.

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To visit Antelope Canyon, take Hwy. 89 north to Page, which is about 130 miles north of Flagstaff.

Take the midday tour, or when the sun is directly overhead (depending on the time of year). Discuss the matter with the tour office when booking. I'm told the summer solstice in midday June is an excellent time to go. Tours fill up fast, so make plans ahead of time. No daypacks are allowed, as space is limited.

We had a 3:30 p.m. tour. The day was overcast, and the beams of pouring sand were not as dramatic. But they were immensely pleasing and memorable. Stand close to the tour guide to hear his informative talk and it's *the* best place for photographing!

High season is April to October, when the crowds are the largest. The tour takes 1.5 hours. We booked a group of 28 friends (at \$38 per person) with Antelope Canyon Tours in Page. Telephone (928) 645-9102. The company provides Guide and open-air scenic transport trucks to the site.

Ours was a day trip from Pine, but I recommend staying overnight and exploring surrounding area attractions.

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