



BEARS EARS AREA STARTER KIT

3 DAYS

320 MILES

Scratch the surface in 3 days; ask locals how to extend the trip.

VIEW MAP &
TRAVEL TOOLS >

A pair of towering, distant buttes stand against beautiful scenery. The twin buttes are so distinctive that in each of the native languages of the region their name is the same: Hoon'Naqvut, Shash Jáa, Kwiyaqatu Nukavachi, Ansh An Lashokdiwe, or in English: Bears Ears. (Your best view of the Bears Ears occurs on the third day of this itinerary, but they are not a primary destination.)

Bears Ears National Monument covers a broad expanse of red rock, juniper forests, high plateau, cultural, historic and prehistoric legacy that includes an abundance of early human and Native American historical artifacts left behind by early Clovis people, then later Ancestral Puebloans, Fremont culture and others. The Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Hopi Nation and other tribes have close, contemporary connections to the land.

Perhaps many road trips have covered the distance between Moab and Monument Valley without realizing what's out there. While the designation of Bears Ears has started to change that, southwestern Utah remains a remote and little-understood place.

Two units of Bears Ears, **Indian Creek** and **Shash Jaa**, provide a glimpse into the diverse lands that stretch across the southeastern corner of Utah, in the famed Four Corners region of the United States. You'll visit ancestral cliff dwellings, examine the desert ecosystem, stand beneath gargantuan natural bridges and interact with the communities of locals and Native cultures that call it all home.

Much of Bears Ears National Monument is remote and requires a combination of wayfinding skills and a high-clearance vehicle to access — or the savvy of a well-prepared backpacker. Much of Bears Ears is fragile, too. Travelers to any of the thousands of ancestral sites, including cliff dwellings and kivas, testaments to astonishing architectural prowess and strong prehistoric communities, should visit with extreme care and observe the land's **Respect and Protect** principles. Appreciate from afar. Examine potsherds, arrowheads and other fragments of past cultures with awe, but leave in the places where you find them. Note the imprint of some ancient thumb in the adobe mortar, but leave no trace of your own.

No matter its designation, no matter how you say it, Bears Ears combines profound human past with distinctive and sacred lands. You could lose yourself for days out here, but your Bears Ears Area Starter Kit introduces you to the experiences, places, history and people that give definition to these fascinating lands.

And don't miss our four-part series: [The Voices of Bears Ears](#).

DAY 1 | 160 MILES INTRODUCTIONS TO BEARS EARS

- Indian Creek Corridor Scenic Byway
- Mule Canyon's House on Fire and Cave Tower
- Edge of the Cedars

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If traveling south from the Moab area, start with an exploratory drive through the Indian Creek unit of Bears Ears, on the **Indian Creek Corridor Scenic Byway**, including a stop at Newspaper Rock State Historic Site. Though not the focus of this itinerary, if your schedule permits, add a day (or much more!) for a visit to the Needles District of **Canyonlands National Park**, at the end of the byway. Your best introduction to Bears Ears might just be a stop at **Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum**, whose collection highlights artifacts and lifestyle of Ancestral Puebloan culture. Introductory hikes to the **Shash Jaa** unit of Bears Ears include House on Fire and Cave Towers, but an even more accessible and well-interpreted trail is the Butler Wash Ruins Overlook.

Overnight in **Monticello**, **Blanding** or **Bluff** for lodging, or the IDA-certified International Dark Sky Park **Hovenweep National Monument** for camping, stargazing and early start to tomorrow's adventure. (More information on day two.)



INDIAN CREEK CORRIDOR SCENIC BYWAY

Driving down Indian Creek Corridor Scenic Byway (a unit of Bears Ears National Monument) isn't just a way to get to The Needles District of Canyonlands National Park. Exploring the byway is an adventure in itself with a fascinating history, awe-inspiring views and some worthy stops along the way.

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MULE CANYON'S HOUSE ON FIRE AND CAVE TOWER

In the rugged corridors of secluded Mule Canyon, you'll not only find solitude but also a sense of mystery, as you scramble up rust-colored cliffs to examine the ruins of an ancient Native-American civilization that seemingly vanished into thin air.

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EDGE OF THE CEDARS

Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum is a beautiful repository for ancient artifacts in the Four Corners region and is an excellent companion destination to [Bears Ears National Monument](#). The museum showcases Ancestral Puebloan culture along with contemporary Native American items and the largest display of artifacts in the area.

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DAY 2 | 70 MILES ANCESTRAL LIVES AND CONTEMPORARY ART

- Hovenweep National Monument
- Twin Rocks Trading Post
- River House

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If you camped overnight in [Hovenweep National Monument](#) and the skies were clear, you'll proceed starstruck to the well-interpreted trails of the monument to peer into the lives of an ancient culture who built astonishing multistoried towers on the edge of a canyon more than 700 years ago. Meanwhile, Bluff, Utah, is a small town with a big personality and serves great local food and coffee while the nearby [Twin Rocks Trading Post](#) honors local Navajo artists with fairly priced, museum-caliber baskets and art. The tour continues near the south end of [Shash Jaa](#), with an easy stop at Sand Island petroglyphs and a more challenging visit to the River House Ruin, which showcases a confluence of ancient culture with Mormon pioneer culture. Visit [Bluff Fort Historic Site](#) to fill in the details of this area's pioneer past.

Lodgers can reserve overnight accommodations in [Bluff](#) or you could consider adding a day to this itinerary with an overnight and tour of [Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park](#).



HOVENEWEAP NATIONAL MONUMENT

Hovenweep National Monument is an inspiring place that begs visitors to ask questions about the ancients. 700-year-old and older archaeological sites can be visited by paved and improved dirt roads, but hikes are necessary to fully explore the ruins.

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TWIN ROCKS TRADING POST

The Twin Rocks Trading Post taps into the deep indigenous traditions of the Four Corners region in Southeastern Utah, near the sacred lands of the Navajo Nation and countless ruins of the land's ancestral past

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RIVER HOUSE

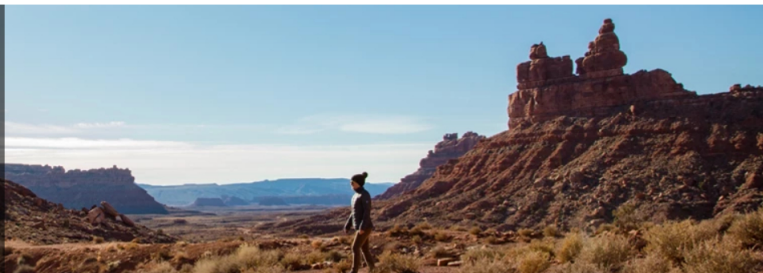
Have you dreamed of setting foot in an ancient Southwestern dwelling, walking alongside walls of pictographs and rock carvings? Hiking alongside the same desert landscape Native Americans and early pioneers? River House site offers visitors a true taste of southern Utah's storied history — here's how to make the most of your exploration.

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DAY 3 | 90 MILES GOOSENECKS, GODS AND BRIDGES

- Goosenecks State Park
- Valley of the Gods
- Natural Bridges National Monument

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As scenic as the trip has been so far, on day three the skies get bigger and the vistas broader as you ascend in elevation to peer down at the meandering San Juan River at **Gooseheads State Park** and explore the **Valley of the Gods Scenic Backway** on an unpaved road through landscapes sometimes described as a miniature Monument Valley — think red rock monoliths below rolling clouds. The drive continues up the unpaved and narrow switchbacks of the Moki Dugway of S.R. 261 — excluding of large RVs and trailers — to crest the vast and lush **Cedar Mesa**. Here, the eponymous Bears Ears formation come fully into view, two distinctive buttes rising from the mesa, which will stay in your windshield as you traverse Cedar Mesa en route to **Natural Bridges National Monument**. Natural Bridges can be enjoyed with an auto tour, stopping at overlooks, but adventurous hikers will want to descend into the canyon at least once to stand beneath some of the world's largest natural bridges.



GOOSEHEADS STATE PARK

Look down upon the San Juan River 1,000 feet below you and see the results of 300 million years of erosion. This one is worth lingering for the sunset. From this primitive state park, you can see the famous gooseheads and also enjoy a picnic and a campsite with great views.

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VALLEY OF THE GODS

Tour the 17-mile gravel backway through isolated mesas, buttes and towers carved from Cedar Mesa sandstone. There is hiking throughout the Valley of the Gods, but it's more of an exploration in cross-country meandering, as there are no established trails.

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NATURAL BRIDGES NATIONAL MONUMENT

The amazing force of water has cut three spectacular natural bridges in White Canyon. Choose from the 9-mile scenic drive with overlooks to the bridges or moderate to difficult trails, some with metal stairs leading down to each bridge. A longer trail follows the stream bed beneath all three.

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ROUTE MAP



EXPLORE MORE

Some other experiences to try close to your journey.



MONUMENT VALLEY JEEP TOUR

Book a tour of Valley Drive (which you can also drive on your own if you have the right vehicle) or a longer trek such as Mystery Valley, accessible only with a licensed guide. A Jeep tour visits the iconic sites, but is accompanied by a Navajo narrative.

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DRIVING DISTANCES

DAY 1: 160 Miles
 DAY 2: 70 Miles
 DAY 3: 90 Miles

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