

Monument Valley...Oh What a 'View'

By Sue Eyre

Near the American landmark of the 'Four Corners,' on the Utah/Arizona border, sandstone butte features rise up to 1000 feet above the floor of the Colorado Plateau already at over 5,000 feet above sea level. These features are part of Monument Valley Navajo Nations Park.

Unlike other National Parks, this 25,000 square mile park is part of the Navajo Nations Reservation and is run entirely by its residents. You can leave your Senior Parks Pass in your wallet, as this independently run park charges it's own fee of \$8/pp/day. The entry booth is open from 6:30 AM to 5:30 PM in peak season. If you plan a trip, be sure to check their website for updates on times and fees and other important information.

You won't find paved roads or National Park outhouses on the gravel, sometimes very rough roads, within the park. If you drive your own vehicle, you will be limited to the main scenic drive well marked on the map you receive at the visitors center. Other, more remote areas of the park are only accessible if you book a tour. Tours range anywhere from a private tour in your own vehicle to jeeps, horses or 'shake 'n bakes' (open air trucks). Again, if you decide to visit in peak tourist times, book ahead to avoid disappointment.

Lodging and camping are available at a few places within a reasonable drive from the park, but on our last trip, we opted for the only 'in park' lodging. 'The View' hotel and cabins opened in 2008. Although expensive, the experience of staying in the park was breathtaking and memorable.

The primary advantage to spending the night at 'The View' is that guests have a front row seat to sunset, sunrise and the night sky in a 'dark sky' environment. Our stay on the night of July 17, 2022 did not provide a sunset or a starry night sky as clouds moved in just before dusk. We did see some lightning in the distance, but no great picture opportunities. Sunrise the next morning, however, was spectacular.

These beautiful buttes within the park are millions of years old and offer visitors an every-changing landscape based on time of day, weather and change of season. Two of the most recognizable and photographed features are the East and West Mittens and the views from John Ford Point. The latter was made famous by film director John Ford and the movies he made featuring John Wayne in the 1940s and 50s. Other movies continue to use these buttes as a backdrop.

Today, tourism is the main source of income, however, uranium was mined in the area from 1945-1967.

Fun Fact: Mesa vs. Butte

Butte = the feature is taller than it is wide

Mesa = the feature is wider than it is tall and it is larger and less elevated



15 minutes before sunrise from our balcony at 'The View' Hotel in Monument Valley. The first two features on the left are West and East Mitten—left hand/right hand



Sue Eyre standing on John Ford Point (middle, far right) overlooking the great expanse of the Monument Valley features rising above the Colorado Plateau



Navajo horse corral nestled along side one of the many features in Monument Valley



'The View' Hotel overlooking Monument Valley blends into its natural surroundings