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The Sydney Morning Herald

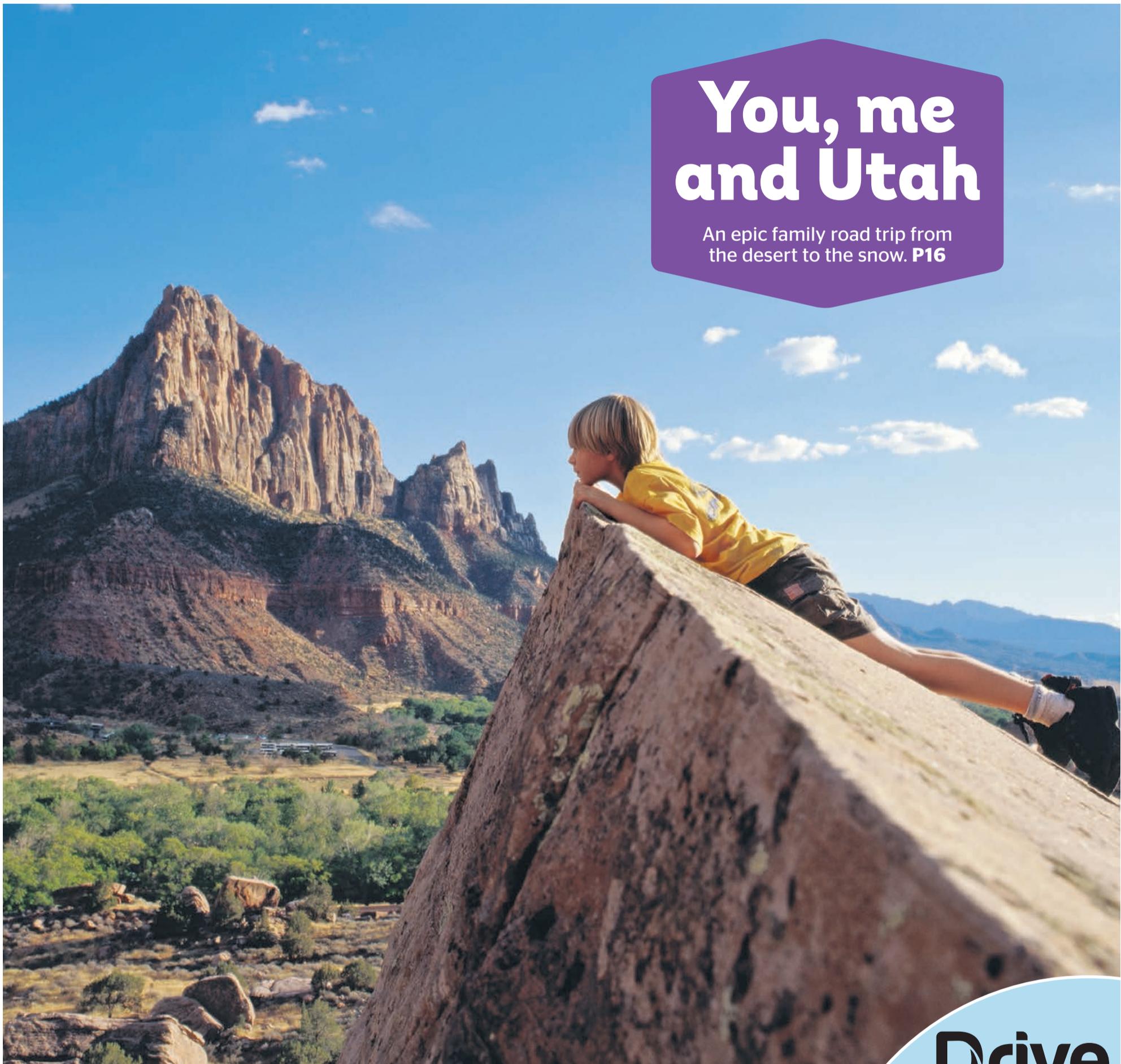
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Cover story

UNITED STATES

Salt of the earth

From mountains to deserts, Utah is god's gift to lovers of the big outdoors, writes **Jane Reddy**.

There are many ways to cross the snow covered Wasatch Mountains of Utah. By skis, in wide elegant arcs; by chairlift underneath a gentle snowfall, or by gondola, packed tight, rubbing Gore-Tex clad shoulders with fellow enthusiasts to heights of 3000 metres. Today, I'm flat on my back, strapped into the first-aid sled, eyes to the cloudless sky after an inelegant turn on a green run. The shame. My family, passing in a chairlift overhead, send cheery salutations mouthing "R U OK" en route to a more difficult slope, as Val of the snow patrol is left to tow me down to the mountain doctor. She blows hard on her whistle that screams "get outta my way" to anyone in her path.

The diagnoses – a knee sprain and bruised ego – are not even in the ballpark of Val's litany of injuries sustained from an otherwise healthful lifestyle in the place where muscular locals carry the glow of a life lived far from a desk.

From white mountains to yawning desert and slot canyons, Utah is a state that is god's gift to lovers of the big outdoors; where, with a simple change from ski boots to hiking boots, one could be among snow covered mountains before lunch and other-worldly sandstone hoodoos at sunset. Adventure is easy and accessible.

Immersed in landscapes shaped by wind, water and time, super highways are an absolute bonus for families and the time-poor on a journey of geological time travel of millions of years.

Some may balk at an 18 or so hour flight to Salt Lake City from Australia just to get to the holiday starting line, but cry me a river. Modern-day inconveniences pale when you are venturing into a state Mormon pilgrims pioneered with wagons, often in axle-deep

mud. Led by Brigham Young in 1847 of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the 3000-strong faithful journeyed west from Illinois before settling at the Valley of the Great Salt Lake where Young declared "This is the place".

We don't have that long for our road trip, just 10 days. But with a Jeep Patriot in this land of the free, an 11 and eight-year-old in the back and a gas station at most highway exits, we're ready to test the time limits of a ski and hike adventure.

In the centennial year of the National Park Service in this state of five national parks, six national monuments and an end-of-season dump of snow, we have hit nature's paydirt, all with a driving distance under 1000 kilometres.

SALT LAKE CITY TO PARK CITY 55 kilometres, 40 minutes

Park City will be a revelation to anyone who considers resort towns the exclusive domain of snow aficionados, built-out with modern condos. The largest ski area in the United States is on the doorstep of Salt Lake City Airport; an easy drive into the Wasatch Mountains (with some help from Google maps).

Long before the skiers and boarders came, the region's silver veins made millionaires of 23 people (one of them the father of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst).

The rich silver ore and the consequent booms and busts saw mining finish in the area in the early 1980s, but parts of its heritage are well-preserved around town.

We spend an afternoon exploring the genuinely western town with street names such as Payday and Bonanza, a legacy of the mining days and the Main Street, with its charming Queen



Anne, Spanish revival and Victorian buildings, all built after a disastrous fire in 1898. At a time when the population was nearing 10,000, 200 of 350 homes and businesses burnt including the grand opera house and 500 people were left homeless. There's said to be more than 100

independent boutiques ("mom and pop shops") and locals are hoping the character of the place will remain, despite the recent merger of the Park City and Canyons resorts.

Be sure to stop in at the Park City History museum inside the old City Hall of 1885 (parkcityhistory.org).

DON'T MISS Tubing on Gorgoza Park. An ideal place for effortless snow play while giving your ski legs a rest. There's seven lanes, all served by magic carpet lifts and in between midair maniacal laughter (it's that much fun) we take hot chocolate breaks in the heated yurt. See gorgoza.com

EAT You'll need to book to get a table at the pumping Riverhorse on Main for heart-warming choices including huckleberry mojito and a Rocky Mountain rack of lamb (riverhorsegroup.com). For a relaxed brunch or lunch, Silver Star Cafe's dishes include organic spinach with fetta, mushrooms and

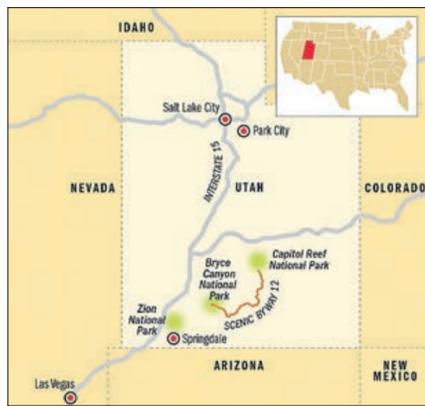
pomegranate vinaigrette and wood fired pizzas of prosciutto and blood orange (thesilverstarcafe.com). **WHERE TO STAY** Park City Waldorf Astoria at the Canyons Village is more than a pretty face, with its lobby chandeliers made of Baccarat crystals and stags fashioned from 150-year-old hand-carved wood.

Getting from the hotel and onto the slopes, with children in tow, is close to effortless with the hotel's dedicated Frostwood Gondola to take you to the Canyons village base and the start of the runs.

Helpful staff take you by buggy on the short ride to the gondola. Rooms from \$US609 a night (parkcitywaldorfastoria.com, visitparkcity.com).

PARK CITY TO DEER VALLEY 2 kilometres, 10 minutes

Deer Valley resort is a skier-only



affair and some argue more true to alpine sports with not one snowboarder in sight.

Ski credentials aside, this evening cowboy Justin, in leather chaps and Stetson with horses and sleigh is making my long-buried childhood Disney dreams come true. The farmer-insurance salesman by day tucks heavy blankets around us before some circle work among fir and aspen and the peculiar quiet that snow landscapes bring.

DON'T MISS An afternoon at the imposing and popular family resort, the 220-room Montage atop Empire Pass that welcomes outside guests. We spend an afternoon in Daly's Pub and Rec sampling the local microbrews like Shades of Pale and Park City Brewery, in between frames on the four-lane bowling alley beside us.

There's also shuffleboard, darts and vintage arcade games. While skiing may be the main game in the mountains, spas are also a serious

In 2015, Zion National Park recorded 3.6 million visitors and numbers are predicted to be up 30 per cent for 2016.



Heights of adventure: (Clockwise from main) Walter's Wiggles trail at Zion National Park, Utah; the Utah Grizzlies in action; Park City; a canyon at Zion National Park; fire pits on the Glitretind deck; a rock climber tries to scale an overhanging sandstone wall; the Mormon Temple is reflected in the pool at Temple Square, Salt Lake City; (bottom) a scenic drive on Byway 12, Utah; the Orange Bubble Express at Park City, Utah. Photos: Carol Polich, Josie Vimahi, iStock; Alamy, Getty Images, Jerry Dodrill, Jason Cameron

fondue fireplace with strawberries and cinnamon pound cake on the side. Justin, bring the sleigh (deervalley.com).

WHERE TO STAY For immersion in the area's ski culture the Stein Eriksen lodge is relaxed and friendly for families.

Named in honour of the alpine ski racer and Olympic gold medallist from Norway – Eriksen was also credited with the creation of the freestyle "aerial" – Eriksen memorabilia lines the walls of the lodge, which has also giant beams, stone fireplaces and couches that guests are welcome to sink into at apres hour.

It's Eriksen branding right down to the lip balm in our suite. We fuel up with other families on quinoa porridge, maple glazed sausage and elk bacon. Rooms in ski season cost from \$US550 a night (steineriksen.com).

DEER VALLEY TO SALT LAKE CITY 57 kilometres, 55 minutes

The state capital with its mountain backdrop is an easy place to navigate thanks to the gridded, 40-metre-wide streets originally built to allow for the turning of four oxen pulling a wagon. We find the state's most visited attraction, the Latter Day Saints Temple Square, that covers four hectares.

Here we sit and listen to the Tabernacle choir rehearsal with the 11,000 pipe organ. It sounds like the voice of angels to our untrained ear, but not so the choirmaster, who is putting the 300-strong member group through its paces during the *Songs of Levi*. "You have to sing this lighter – never, ever push sound."

DON'T MISS Another group with a loyal following is the Utah Grizzlies ice hockey team. The match against the Tulsa Oilers is nothing short of exhilarating with the sounds of cracking hockey sticks and players' bodies thudding against the rink's edge.

We join the locals to stand up for the national anthem, applaud the returned servicemen who are

guests of honour and dodge flying pucks. Aspirin and ear plugs are sold in packs at the game for \$3 and it feels unpatriotic to have anything less than corn dogs, hot dogs, super-sized bags of popcorn and nachos drowned under canary yellow cheese (utahgrizzlies.com) **EAT** For a more sustaining feed with the locals and a short walk from Temple Square, Squatters pub favourites include a turkey mushroom burger, bourbon burgers alongside jambalaya and mac and cheese.

There's a string of microbrews including cask conditioned ales, the American Wheat Hefeweizen and the Polygamy Porter. I order a pitcher of Respect Your Mother Organic Amber and smile at the children.

Leaving the city the next day we stock up on pastries from the excellent Gourmandise Patisseries that's a locals favourite for blueberry croissants and raspberry muffins (squatters.com; gourmandisethebakery.com). **WHERE TO STAY** As the name suggests, the imposing 24-floor Grand America Hotel has museum quality paintings and antiques including the 1760 French tapestry *Games in the Countryside* made at the Aubusson Royal Manufactory. It's close to the local tram that will in turn take you close to Temple Square. Rooms from \$US250 a night (grandamerica.com).

SALT LAKE CITY TO CAPITAL REEF NATIONAL PARK 350 kilometres, 3 hours and 30 minutes

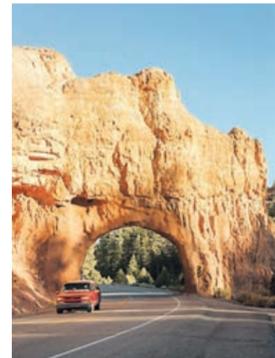
"Today you will go to Mars," says a knowing Utahn as we set off on the Interstate 15 for the reef and its 160-kilometre-long warp, the Waterpocket Fold, in the Earth's crust that defines it.

When the kids start bickering over the last piece of the newly discovered cotton candy, I threaten an alien sibling to sit between the two.

They laugh in my face. We pass tiny towns, each with a large star-spangled banner flying proudly and RVs bigger than the homes they sit next to. There's Mountime Taxidermy in Lyman and in Scipio a farmhouse store selling goods "From Alaska to Australia".

Snow-capped mountains of the morning have given way to rock formations such as The Castle and The Flute Wall that could indeed be from a fantasy novel with its spires, turrets and hideouts. It's a 40-million-year old snapshot with distinct layers and colours of brick-red stone, gray-green rock and orange-red sandstone once ocean, swamp and desert.

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TRIP NOTES

GETTING THERE Virgin Australia has daily services between Sydney or Brisbane to Los Angeles, with non-stop codeshare services on Delta Air lines between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City. See virginaustralia.com Qantas flies daily to LA with connections to Salt Lake City with American Airlines.

SKIING THERE Deer Valley & Park City There are 800 hectares of skiable terrain, 101 trails and 21 chairlifts. The Utah TRIP Pass provides access to both resorts from \$US113 a day for adults, \$US66 for children. See visitparkcity.com/international-visitors/two-resort-pass, deervalley.com

HIKING THERE The annual America the Beautiful Pass costs \$US80 a car and provides entry to all US National Parks. A seven-day entrance for Bryce and Canyon costs \$US30. See nps.gov.

Jane Reddy was a guest of the Utah Office of Tourism.

WHERE TO STAY Park City In 2015, operators Vail Resorts linked Park City and Canyons to create the largest resort in the United States. See parkcitymountain.com. The 2016-17 Epic Pass offers unlimited access to all of Vail Resorts destinations. It costs \$US809 for adults and \$US419 for children; see EpicPass.com.

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From page 17

At the aptly named Goosenecks Point the otherworldliness is fully revealed as we stare down the red hued canyon 244 metres below. A woman commends our kids for keeping a safe distance from the edge but still, I can hardly breathe. These landscapes are far from static; Sulphur Creek, a tributary of the Colorado River, continues to shape the canyon.

DON'T MISS A walk among the Cas Mulford orchard, one of the largest historic orchards in the National Park Service with more than 3000 trees of apple, peach, pear, apricot, cherry and plum. When the fruit is ready visitors can use the three legged ladders to pick a bag for a nominal fee.

EAT Sit under cottonwood trees and eat fresh baked pie and cinnamon rolls from the Gifford Homestead, one of the few remaining buildings from the historic Fruita district established in 1880 by a group of Mormons led by Nels Johnson.

The homestead includes a seven room house, barn and smokehouse and doubles as a museum. Its spartan nature recalls the rural Utah farm homes of the early 1900s.

WHERE TO STAY We're pushing on to Bryce Canyon. The 71 site Fruita Campground is full with RVs and the handsome Airstream campers. It's the only developed



Big country: Majestic rock formations tower over the highway. Getty Images

campground in the park. Sites at the Fruita Campground are \$US20 a night.

CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL PARK TO BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

2.5 hours, 186 kilometres

We drive in a golden afternoon light along scenic byway 12, climbing more than 3000 metres on switchbacks, passing alpine forest and patches of snow on one side and pink and russet stone cathedrals on the other. The kids, on nature watch, spot mule deer, jackrabbit and squirrels. The deer

signs with flashing lights give a party vibe on a road built in parts from grit alone, and with side roads carrying names like Hell's Backbone. During the Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps to provide work to young unmarried men. The CCP blasted through this slickrock terrain removing debris by hand.

At the Head of the Rocks we stare across the Escalante Canyons to plateaus and canyons beyond. The road dubbed the Million Dollar Highway has a matching million dollar outlook.

Continued on page 20

Five must-dos for Utah

JOINTH ETRADITION
Most hotels offer the traditional and sickly sweet campfire S'mores treat: toasted marshmallow and chocolate sandwiched between two Graham crackers.



BOOK AHEAD
Getting onto the slopes can be a test for parents and children. The cheery and on time Ski Butlers staff deliver gear to the hotel room, adjust fittings and collect everything when you're done. See skibutlers.com



GET YOUR BEARING
Zion National Park's excellent shuttle service departs every 15 minutes from Springdale in summer and stops at nine different jumping off points including Angel's Landing and Zion Lodge.

Melting moments: (From top) S'mores treat; the hooded c-hairlifts carry skiers in comfort. Photos: Lauri Patterson, Getty Images

TAKE YOUR TIME
The Capitol Reef, Bryce and Zion visitors centres all contain excellent topographical models and depictions of creatures such as Tyrone (Tylosaurus proriger) the 15 metre lizard that roamed the Bryce area.

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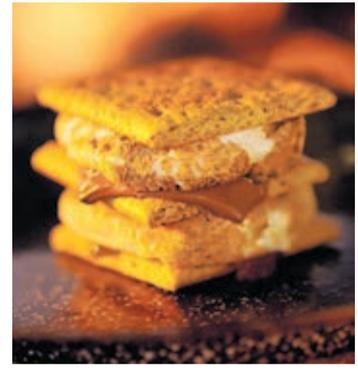
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Cover story

UNITED STATES

From page 18

DON T MISS It seems improper to be rewarded so readily at Bryce s Sunset Point, a vista of hoodoos, statuesque limestone pillars sculpted by rain and time into bulbous spires, all just a 10 minute drive from the hotel and a two minute walk from the carpark. Shouldn t this take more toil?

While the family descends the steep path to walk among them from Sunset Point on the Navajo Loop into the main amphitheatre, I opt for some true blue sky thinking along the paved pathway in the cold thin air.

It s here I read about the Trickster, or the Coyote God Sinawava. Paiute Indians, who inhabited this region for hundreds of years before the arrival of European Americans, state that the hoodoos are ancient Legend People turned into stone by Sinawava. As voices echo up from the chamber of hoodoos I can imagine the Trickster at work.

EAT Energy for the hikes ahead is at Rubys Inn. Established in 1916 and still run by the same family, rustler s ribs, battered green bean fries and cowboy steak with a sauce of portobello mushroom and gorgonzola cheese are on the menu (rubysin.com).

WHERE TO STAY Best Western Plus Bryce Canyon Grand Hotel is the newest accommodation close to the hugely popular Bryce Canyon and is just off Scenic Byway 12, and next to the national park. Rooms are comfortable and the buffet breakfast is included but be prepared to queue at peak times. Rooms from \$US89 a night (brycecanyongrand.com).

BRYCE CANYON TO ZION NATIONAL PARK

1 hour and 20 minutes, 115 kilometres

When artist and topographer Frederick S. Dellenbaugh exhibited his paintings depicting the Zion area at the 1904 St Louis World Fair, spectators did not believe such a place existed. But it was not olde worlde clickbait. In 2015 the park recorded 3.6 million visitors and numbers are predicted to be up by 30 per cent for 2016. Today, at the end of spring break the queues of RVs are long to see Zion s sculpted sandstone canyons following the path of the Virgin River along the canyon floor.

Walks with sweet names and terrifying drops Angel s Landing looking down 450 metres for starters are not for the faint of heart, while on the Emerald Pools Trail we walk alongside the elderly and children in wheelchairs on the wide and flat path.

Near the Temple of Sinawava, rock climbers are mere specks. The blockbuster walk into the Narrows Canyon is closed as river levels are on the rise, so we tackle the Canyon Overlook trail for biblical vistas to the West Temple, Altar of Sacrifice and The Sentinel. This is my kind of worship (zionoutfitter.com).



Great outdoors: (From top) On the road with Zion Jeep Tours; skiing at Park City, Utah; hikers on Angel s Landing in Zion National Park. Photos: Getty Images, Dan Campbell

DON T MISS A thrilling ride outside the park for effortless views atop mesas isolated flat topped hills with steep sides in an open back Jeep with Zion Outback Safaris. Climbing 500 metres, we pass Hurricane Mesa, an Air Force testing facility said to have an ejection seat from a supersonic sled, before heading through Rockville.

Here, residents are passionate about the protection of the night sky from light pollution with a 60 watt limit on each fitting which is a far cry from the glow of Las Vegas 250 kilometres over the border in Nevada. We cross the historic Grafton Bridge for sunset over Grafton Mesa where Red Bull Rampage mountain bikers hurl themselves off the edge and we get a sunset view that could be a Dellenbaugh painting (zionjeeptours.com, redbull.com).

EAT Springdale at the park s entrance is full with locally owned eateries. For excellent coffee go to Cafe Soleil at the park entrance.

It s worth a 20 minute wait at Oscar s for generous servings of burgers and Mexican (oscarscafe.com) or the Spotted Dog with regional choices of Rocky Mountain Red Trout or Wild Game Meatloaf, elk buffalo and beef, wrapped in bacon with pan gravy (flanigans.com).

WHERE TO STAY The family owned Cliffrose Lodge and Gardens within the Zion Canyon, a short walk to the park s entrance, has modern accommodation on the edge of the Virgin River, where you can easily while away a day in a lounge on the sandy banks staring up at the canyon. Rooms from \$139 a night (cliffroselodge.com). **T**

