

# Respectful Recreation in the Grand Canyon— An Anthropologist's Perspective

**I**N THE VIEWS OF MANY Native Americans, and other indigenous people around the world, every animal, plant, rock, and place is a living being, because everything is in the flow of life. Special locations like springs, creeks, and waterfalls are experienced as having especially concentrated life and significance. Everything recognizes respect and disrespect, and everything responds accordingly. Given this viewpoint, the behaviors of visitors to the Grand Canyon affect—either positively or negatively—the natural and spiritual world (which are not separate, but the same).

Accordingly, in a metaphysical sense, what a visitor does at a place can affect the spirit of the place—and the spirit of those who have been to the place because they are still in that place. Ancestors are not just people who lived and died a long time ago. They are still present in the places they lived. Place is more important than time, and place is not separate from time. Time and people and actions accumulate in places. We see our actions as affecting the present (and perhaps the future), but in the cultures of people who call the Grand Canyon their homeland, our actions are seen as impacting the present, the future, *and* the past (and those in the past).

So, how can we recreate in the Grand Canyon in a way that respects these relationships? Traditionals approach any special place quietly and respectfully. In this way, you and the Place (and the past people in it) get to know each other by watching, listening, and feeling. You acknowledge mutual respect by quietly, even silently, asking permission to visit, and by observing what's already there. Partying, yelling, and jumping right into the watery home of myriads of small creatures disrupts the quiet contemplation of those already there and those to come in the future. For many Native Americans, the Grand Canyon is the place of original emergence into this world and is therefore the embodiment of the Earth's womb and of their own identities as people. This way of understanding and experiencing the world is fundamentally different than the way most non-Natives experience the Canyon, at least initially. But we, too, can develop a close, respectful, and rewarding relationship by approaching places like the Little Colorado River, Elves' Chasm, and Deer Creek slowly, taking in the beauty—giving time to acknowledge the specialness and connect our spirits with the spirits of the place—before getting in the waters.

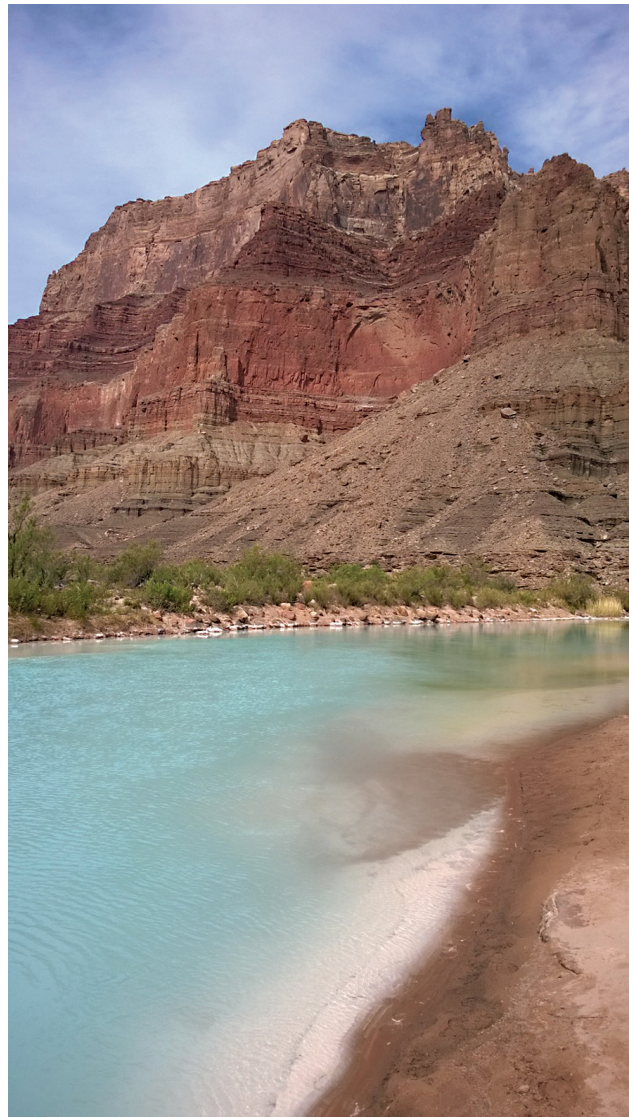


photo: Greg Woodall

The Grand Canyon is a National Park, a World Heritage site, and homeland to other cultures; so showing a little respect as we visit is only appropriate.

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