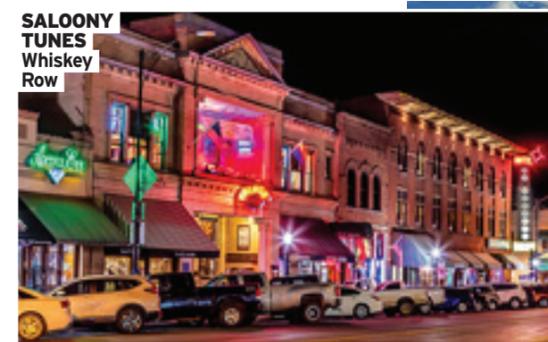


# TRAVEL

# A GRAND ADVENTURE



**SALOONY TUNES**  
Whiskey Row

**CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE** but lives in Sedona," driver Roger had said. I don't think he was exaggerating.

Our tour group had flown in a few days previously. It was a sunny Friday afternoon when we'd landed in Phoenix, in stark contrast to the dismal British November we'd left behind.

The state capital is nestled on the northern edge of the giant Sonoran Desert, but we didn't hang around, instead hitting the highway north into the mountains and the start of the Colorado Plateau.

As we climbed, the temperature dropped along with the night. Our destination was the former capital, Prescott, up at 5,300ft. Once on the frontier of the old Wild West, the pretty little city is now a world away from its former incarnation as a gritty gold and silver-mining town from where brutal campaigns were waged against the local Native American tribes.

The Friday night streets were dark and sleepy until we reached Whiskey Row on the far side of the historic main square, Courthouse Plaza.

As its fantastic name suggests, Whiskey Row is a strip full of lively old-school saloons where cowboys and miners once congregated. There were still plenty of cowboy boots and rakishly-angled hats on display, but the hard drinking and gambling of old was replaced by locals and tourists alike jauntily line-dancing to live music.

After throwing back a few bourbons, I couldn't help but attempt to join in.

It wasn't pretty.

I was feeling a little delicate the following morning as we headed out of town to go kayaking on nearby Watson Lake. But my blariness was soon swept aside when I caught sight of the hypnotically surreal landscape. The reservoir was surrounded by miles of rounded granite rock formations and boulders, 1.4 billion years in the making.

Gliding over the tranquil waters, I navigated around the hulking rocks under a giant sky of blue. It felt otherworldly.

Our next stop was over the nearby Black Hills into the Verde Valley, home to one of the three major wine regions in Arizona. Our day was spent visiting a couple of nice wineries – Alcantara Vineyards and the Southwest Wine Center – where we sampled a variety of vinos that left us a little hazy on such a clear afternoon. We



**NORTH STAR**  
The canyon's North Rim



**JEEP THRILLS**  
Chris's jeep tour

stayed the night in the tiny tourist city of Cottonwood, with its cute Main Street of tourist shops and restaurants, before heading out the next day towards the looming red rock mountains of Sedona

that were blushing further in the early morning sunshine.

There are scores of trails and vantage points surrounding the city, let alone in the wider area, making it difficult to know where to start.

We began with Red Rock State Park to the west of town. From its five miles of rolling trails you get great views across the last of the Verde Valley to Sedona's most famous mountain,

Cathedral Rock, the towering cluster of sandstone buttes and pinnacles that stand sentinel over the bloodshot bluffs beyond.

We then went on to Sedona itself, to Uptown, which is its downtown, if that makes

sense. There, we perused the dozens of busy tourist shops and boutiques before heading out on the aforementioned Pink

Jeep Tour. After Roger had scared, thrilled, and educated us in equal measure, we returned at sundown for dinner and further impressive views at The Vault Uptown restaurant.

I had a steak that was as deliciously pink as the hills and dusky sky. Very yum.

The following day we continued upwards and northwards to Flagstaff, up on the Colorado Plateau proper. It was surprisingly chilly and verdant compared to where we'd just come from. Due to its elevation – almost 7,000ft – Flagstaff is much cooler than Phoenix in the summers, and covered in snow for several months in winter.

We had a hearty lunch accompanied by beer tasting at the cool Lumberyard Brewing Company before heading a little unsteadily on to the Museum of Northern Arizona. There, we saw great displays about the natural and Native American history of the Colorado Plateau, named after the river which runs through it.

Stretching across Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and of course Colorado, it contains an incredible 26 national parks and monuments, with its vast and mesmerizing geology making it one of the most beautiful regions on the planet.

Afterwards, we perused Flagstaff's small, but cool Old Town, with its low-rise redbrick buildings that are home to trendy boutiques, bars and cafes before



**ROCK AND AWE**  
Chris at the Grand Canyon

staying the night at the funky High Country Motor Lodge, a former motel that's had a \$13million renovation to hipster-fy it.

Flagstaff's clear skies and altitude make it famous for stargazing, but when we went to the Lowell Observatory situated on a hill above the town that night, of course it had to be cloudy.

The next day we headed on to the

main event, the Grand Canyon. But we needed feeding first, so pit-stopped for a platter of traditional American breakfast at the Pine Country Restaurant in Williams, another great little tourist town with an Old West feel, situated on the historic Route 66, an hour to the south of the canyon.

It's also the start of the Grand Canyon Railway, the relatively pricey tourist train taking 2 hours 15 minutes to trundle to its destination.

The Grand Canyon was even more mind-blowingly beautiful than expected. Too vast to comprehend, let alone put into words, photos, or even videos.

It stretched out in all directions. So many layers. So many sub-canyons. Cliffs. Crevices. Strata. Colours. Shades. Shadows. One mile deep, a mind-boggling 1,900 square miles in total.

It would've taken days just to get a handle on it all, and definitely a hike to its bottom, but we only had a few hours.

That was enough, though, for a fantastic Hummer tour to three points along the canyon's South Rim with Navajo local guide Jerry Lefthand, a cool dude who gave us fascinating insights into Native American history and culture.

Our final stop was for sunset at Grandeur Point. It was relatively



**FUNKY**  
High Country Motor Lodge

“The Grand Canyon was too vast to comprehend, let alone put into words”

## GET THERE

American Airlines flies from Heathrow to Phoenix, Arizona, from £574 return. [americanairlines.co.uk](http://americanairlines.co.uk)

## BOOK IT

Rooms at the SpringHill Suites by Marriott hotel in Prescott, Arizona, start at around £100 a night. [marriott.com](http://marriott.com)

Rooms at the SpringHill Suites by Marriott hotel in Cottonwood, Arizona, start at around £124 a night. [marriott.com](http://marriott.com)

Rooms at the Aiden by Best Western hotel in Sedona, Arizona, start at around £181 a night. [bestwestern.com](http://bestwestern.com)

Rooms at the Red Feather Lodge in Tusayan, Arizona, start at around £182 a night. [redfeatherlodge.com](http://redfeatherlodge.com)

Rooms at the High Country Motor Lodge in Flagstaff, Arizona, start at around £107 a night. [highcountrymotorlodge.com](http://highcountrymotorlodge.com)

## MORE INFO

[visitarizona.com](http://visitarizona.com)

busy, but yet at the same time quiet, as most people were sat in awe-struck silence watching the sun sink before the greatest of the world's natural wonders.

“Does this all become normal to you after coming here every day?” I asked Jerry.

“Never,” he replied within the blink of an eye that looked at me curiously that I could ask such a silly question.

Suitably told, I turned back to take in the vast vista, and soon also became silenced myself.



## Travel test

BY **CARRIE ANDERSON**

**WHAT:** Virgin Atlantic flight VS449, Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, in an Economy Classic seat.

**WHERE:** London Heathrow to Johannesburg, South Africa, from £716 return, [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com).

**EXPERIENCE:** With an 11-hour flight and a 10.25pm take-off, I was keen to get settled quickly.

The overhead lockers were large and deep but, sat near the back, the ones directly above my 31in-pitch seat were out of use to passengers. There was space in nearby lockers but I was lucky to be on a relatively quiet flight with a row to myself, so I used the underseat space next to me.

The seatback pocket had room for my water bottle and phone, and came with a pillow, blanket and headset for the Vera entertainment system with plenty of films and TV shows, plus music.

The seat had a power socket and USB port. You could pay for wi-fi – from £2.99 for messaging throughout the flight and up to £20.99 for everything bar streaming.

More keen on sleep, I stretched out across the three seats after take-off and got some shuteye, snoozing as a meal was served about an hour into the flight.

The cabin temperature was comfortable, the friendly crew were always on hand, and at about 6am UK time they discreetly came through the cabin offering water and juice.

About two hours before landing breakfast was served. I went for the decent full English which came with a fruit pot, yogurt, pain au chocolat and hot drinks.

**QUIBBLES:** My seat rest wouldn't recline without help from the crew. It was a full flight so I couldn't move, though with my neighbour's arm pressing against me, sleeping was always going to be a challenge!

**VERDICT:** Seat comfort was very much in line with other carriers, but I was impressed with the food and crew. **8/10**

Soaring sterling is boosting Brits' holiday spending power. Post Office Travel Money says the pound is up year on year against 21 of its 25 bestselling currencies including euros, US dollars and in Turkey, Kenya, Japan, Egypt, Thailand, South Africa and Australia. [postoffice.co.uk/travel](http://postoffice.co.uk/travel)