



The Wilson Family has lived in Canyon De Chelly (pronounced “shay”) for many generations, and owns a plot of land there that can be used for overnight camping. They are all experienced guides, and know all the stories, sites, and folklore of the Canyon. Delbert, on the right, runs the operation, while Fanny (Mom), on the left, is the chief administrator. Maureen, David (Dad), or Delbert will take you on a private tour in one of the clean, well-maintained, late model Jeeps. BMGHA recommends the small one with the top off for an up-close and personal experience. The four-door is convertible as well.

If you love the night life, like to boogie, then this is not the place for you. If you spend much of your time playing video games, or cannot last more than a few minutes without using your cell phone or personal entertainment device, then your soul is not ready for the beautiful, serene, and spiritually uplifting experience of Diné Bikéyah (Navajo Land). For you, I recommend Manhattan. (You can’t get cell service in the Canyon anyway, and there is no electricity).

Canyon De Chelly has been the heart of Diné Bikéyah since Changing Woman gave birth to the Navajos (outsiders call them Navajos; they call themselves Diné). In these 26 miles of red sandstone canyon, in some places over a thousand feet deep, the Navajos and their ancestors hid from their enemies, traded with their friends, raised crops and livestock, and became the most powerful native group in North America. On a tour of the Canyon, one can see petroglyphs, pictographs, and other rock art ranging back as much as two and a half millennia. Prehistoric ruins mark places where people lived, gathered for ceremonies, and took refuge from the weather and from their enemies. Rock formations in the Canyon provide the basis for stories and lore used to educate, to remind, and to prepare the young for traditional life.

While Navajos were feared and despised by their traditional enemies, the Utes, the Apaches, and later the Spanish, the Mexicans, and the Americans, they are a gentle, friendly, intelligent, and highly adaptable people who excel at weaving, silver smithing, raising livestock, and taking foreign ideas and making them their own. Diné Bikéyah is defined by the four sacred mountains: Sis Naajini (Blanca Peak, Colorado), the Sacred Mountain of the East; Tsoodzil (Mount Taylor, New Mexico), the Sacred Mountain of the South; Dook'oo'os3íid (San Francisco Peaks, Arizona) the Sacred Mountain of the West; Dibé Nitsaa (Hesperus Peak, Colorado), the Sacred Mountain of the North. Canyon De Chelly is the physical and spiritual center of this territory.

Canyon De Chelly was set aside as a National Monument by Theodore Roosevelt in order to protect the land and the people from exploitation. Visitors are not permitted to enter the Canyon without an authorized Navajo guide and a permit—remember, you are traipsing through someone's backyard. You can use North Rim Drive and South Rim Drive without a guide to view some of the ruins, such as White House and Antelope House, and rock formations, such as Tsi na ash jeii (Spider Rock), where Spider Woman, who taught the Navajos how to weave, resides. It is said that when Face Rock informs Spider Woman of children who misbehave, she carries them to the top of Spider Rock. From the North Rim, one can see the prehistoric ruins of Mummy Cave, and Massacre Cave, where 115 Navajos were killed and 33 more were captured by the Spanish in 1805. A word of caution: Navajos do not speak directly of the dead, nor do they generally go where people are known to have died. They would not make good ghost hunters.

The nearest large town is Gallup, NM, about 95 miles (2 hrs.) away. Flagstaff, AZ is about three hours, and Albuquerque is about four hours away. Just outside the entrance to the Canyon is the town of Chinle, with hotels and restaurants available. If you go, don't forget to sample the Navajo Fry Bread, which can be eaten in a number of different ways. Another word of caution: don't order anything made with fry bread (like a Navajo taco) unless you are seriously hungry. Otherwise, you will be taking some home with you.

For reservations and information about private jeep tours, hiking tours, overnight camping, and step-on guides for your own SUV, call these numbers in order. If someone is in the Canyon, there is no reception: (928) 675-0461 (928) 675-1649 (928) 349-3109 (928) 797-7837

Diné Bikéyah Jeep  
Tours P.O. Box 1174  
Chinle, AZ 86503

Three hour Jeep tours:

1-3 people - \$150 (\$50 each additional  
hr.) 4 people - \$200 (\$50 each additional  
hr.) 5-6 people - \$250 (\$60 each  
additional hr)

Step-on guide for your own SUV: \$30 for 3 hours (\$10 for each additional  
hour) All other tours by arrangement.