



We looked forward to the experience as we drove to Arizona's Grand Canyon last summer. Usually all motel rooms, cabins and dorms are sold out weeks in advance throughout the entire Canyon area. We arrived to check in a day earlier than our reservation called for, and thought we'd have to spend the night in our car. However, we were lucky to be put up in a very basic dorm cabin with the communal bathroom down the hall.

The dorm has a fantastic location, because the Canyon edge was only about 20 feet out the back door. If we had been sleepwalkers, it could have been disastrous. Another mistake was that we thought we'd just saunter over to the start of the Bright Angel Trail bright and early the next morning and join the famous Canyon mule ride.

When we got to the corral where the mules were grazing, we asked about joining in that day's venture. We were told that the ride is so popular, it's sold out at least a year in advance. So we hung around for an hour or so watching the mules get hitched up, tourist riders being instructed by the drovers and then all started on their ride as we waved a disappointed farewell.

The Bright Angel Trail has been the site for Grand Canyon mule trips since 1891. Posted regulations say riders must be physically fit, not more than two months' pregnant, at least 4 feet 7 inches tall (sorry, kids), weigh less than 200 pounds (sorry, cousin Lardo) and know enough English to follow all instructions (lo siento, tio Pedro).

Charge for a one-day mule trip is about \$150; for two days, including overnight in a cabin and meals at the Canyon bottom, run from \$400 to \$550. For private parties and longer trips, the costs go accordingly higher. For reservations and more information, call 1-888-297-2757.

Of course, there were many other great activities at the Canyon. We hiked the South Rim and marveled at how the sun painted a changing variety of colors as it passed above us. There was also an evening campfire barbeque, history lesson and music presentation by the Park Ranger staff in the nearby woodlands.

We also tried to hike along the beginnings of the mule track at Bright Angel Trail, but chickened out when we saw how narrow and steep it was. It gave these shaky old folks a great admiration for the mules who are miraculously surefooted. Will we go back and next time be all booked up correctly a year in advance for the ride? We can be as stubborn as mules, too. Of course we'll be back.

