



Grand Discovery 1

Upper Grand Canyon (Row)

Expedition Description

June 24th - 30th, 2026

Ages 15 - 19

1. Receive Expedition Description

- Letter from Executive Director
- Expedition Details
- Frequently Asked Questions
- How to Pack & Packing List

2. Apply & Pay Deposit Online

- Please follow the link on the GCY website to submit your application.
- Your deposit of \$400 (\$50 if applying for financial aid) is required with your application to secure your place.
- If you have questions about paying your deposit, please ask the GCY Office.

3. Complete Pre-Trip Requirements

- Plan and carry out your Service and Youth Earnings Requirements. Engaging with and responding to weekly emails before the expedition will fulfill your Educational Requirement.

4. Final Payment & Preparation

- Your final payment and any outstanding paperwork are due at least one month before your expedition (**May 24th, 2026**). You may [make payments on the GCY website](#).

5. Enjoy your GCY Expedition!

Please contact GCY with any questions
928.773.7921 • expeditions@gcyouth.org



2131 N First St Flagstaff, AZ 86004 Phone: 928.773.7921 Fax: 928.774.8941
office@gcyouth.org www.gcyouth.org

Dear Parents & Guardians,

Welcome to Grand Canyon Youth! We are so pleased to have your youth joining us for a life-changing adventure.

Grand Canyon Youth (GCY) is a nonprofit organization based in Flagstaff that provides outdoor experiences to young people ages 10-19. We believe that all young people can benefit from time spent in natural places. GCY serves schools, groups, and youth from across the country.

Our programs are educational in nature: in addition to exploring the outdoors, your youth's journey with us will include hands-on science, art-making, time for reflection, teamwork, and much more.

For over 25 years, GCY has run hundreds of expeditions with thousands of participants from across the country! Our office staff will guide you and your youth every step of the way as you prepare for their adventure. Thank you for choosing to send your youth on a Grand Canyon Youth expedition. Nature and wilderness have the power to transform lives, and we are honored to share this opportunity with your youth.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions as you prepare your youth for their GCY expedition.

Sincerely,



Emma Wharton, MSW
GCY Executive Director

In service to our mission and values, GCY would like to acknowledge that this expedition visits the ancestral homelands of the Nucu (Ute), Pueblos, Diné (Navajo), Hopitutskwa (Hopi), Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute), Havasu Baaja (Havasupai), Kvav-Kapai (Hualapai), Pipa Aha Macav (Mojave), and Nuwuwu (Chemehuevi) peoples, past and present. We recognize with gratitude the people who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial and the vibrant Native communities who make their home here today.

Connect with GCY





Grand Discovery 1
Upper Grand Canyon (Row)
Wednesday, June 24th - Tuesday, June 30th, 2026

Expedition Details

Total Price per Participant: \$1,200

Deposit: \$400

Due: With Application

Final Payment: \$800

Due: Sunday, May 24th, 2026

**Financial aid may be available for this expedition. If requesting financial aid, your deposit is adjusted to \$50. Find the Financial Aid Application at the end of the online Youth Application.*

Expedition Begins

3:30 PM, Wednesday, June 24th, at the Grand Canyon Youth office (2131 N. First Street, Flagstaff). Please have all your gear packed, and dress in what you plan to wear camping for the evening. Make sure you have two full water bottles. After a short orientation, you will get into vans, eat dinner (provided by GCY), and head to Lees Ferry to camp for the night.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE: The last day of this expedition is spent hiking **7 miles UP and OUT OF THE GRAND CANYON** via the Bright Angel Trail, carrying a heavy pack with all your personal belongings. Every group hikes at their own pace; this steep and strenuous hike can take groups anywhere between 5 and 12 hrs. There are several places to stop, rest, and refill water bottles along the way. You will be encouraged to go at your own pace and supported by GCY field staff. Consider this expedition only if you can train by hiking with a pack in the heat before your expedition launch.

Expedition Returns

Approximately 4:30 PM, Tuesday, June 30th, at the Grand Canyon Youth office.

Parents/Guardians will be called or texted if participants are returning more than a half-hour late or early.

What sets Grand Canyon Youth apart?

GCY provides some of the only access to the rivers and canyons of the Southwest dedicated to youth programming. We are committed to serving youth from a variety of backgrounds, so anyone who is interested has the chance to participate. Additionally, by completing GCY's Pre-Trip Requirements - community service, youth earnings, and an educational component - participants gain a strong sense of ownership over their program. GCY supports each expedition financially by offsetting about half of the trip price with money from donors, grants, and other fundraising efforts. All of this makes GCY stand apart, and provide unique, educational, high-quality expeditions.

About the Grand Discovery expedition

Join us on an adventure where we'll explore big questions like, "Who am I in this place?" Together, we'll dive into the diverse voices and perspectives that shape the Grand Canyon, from its ancient geology to the cultural stories passed through generations. Along the way, we'll embrace our own sense of wonder, build lasting friendships, and experience the canyon's beauty in ways few others ever do.

Developed in collaboration with the Education Branch of Grand Canyon National Park, youth on these trips will raft the mighty Colorado River, camp beneath star-strewn skies, hike and swim in beautiful side canyons, and ponder the mysteries of time and place.

This is not just a rafting trip, but a chance to learn from guides and educators while exploring the mysteries of time, place, and personal experience in the Grand Canyon. To learn more, watch the short video "What You Take Away" (<https://gcyouth.org/stories-photos/>).

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this expedition right for me?

- GCY does have very specific physical eligibility requirements. Please read them carefully here: <https://gcyouth.org/essential-eligibility>
- Our expeditions are for curious, enthusiastic individuals with a desire to discover the educational power of the river; no camping or river experience is required.
- You don't need to be super athletic, outdoorsy, or outgoing to enjoy this experience: you just need a sense of adventure, the willingness to exert yourself, and the desire to give back to your community and work as part of a team.
- We can accommodate many special needs; ask for additional information if needed.

How do I get there?

Youth come from all over to participate in our Grand Canyon expeditions! You are responsible for your own travel to and from Grand Canyon Youth's Flagstaff office, including any overnight arrangements needed before or after the expedition. If traveling from outside of Flagstaff, GCY may be able to arrange pick-up at local public transportation hubs such as the shuttle stop, train station, or Flagstaff airport. Travel to and from the river from our office is provided.

What are we going to do out there?

Being in nature means taking a break from the hustle of everyday life. You will spend your days sharing meals, playing games, hiking to incredible vistas or cultural sites, learning about the place, and having a lot of fun! Everyone works together: setting up camp, doing science projects, cooking dinner, and washing dishes. Come ready to work & learn!

Who is coming with me?

Your group will include youth from across the country – sometimes from across the world! Each expedition has a Trip Coordinator, an adult leader in charge of helping you prepare and making your expedition successful! Your Trip Coordinator will communicate with you prior to the expedition and be your main group leader throughout the expedition. At the river, you will meet your guide crew. Our guides have a passion for working with youth. Many GCY guides are alumni of our expeditions! There may also be other educators, scientists, or community experts joining your group.

How difficult will the expedition be?

It is important to be in good physical condition for this adventure. Building up endurance before your expedition is a good idea. You will be outside, active, and in the hot sun every day. This is part of the fun, but can be challenging. Besides rafting and hiking, plan on being active to help load and unload boats, pack and unpack gear, and set up and take down camp each day.

Hiking in the desert Southwest is different from hiking anywhere else. Many hikes contain uphill sections over uneven terrain, near vertical drop-offs. It can be very hot and dry, or wet and cold. Some hikes include rock scrambling and require guide assistance. Hiking is an important aspect of the expedition; expect to hike for a couple of hours most days.

What if there is an emergency?

Most emergencies can be prevented. GCY Field Staff will give safety orientations once youth reach the destination. Everyone is encouraged to take extra care looking out for themselves and adhering to safety guidelines. GCY field staff are certified Wilderness First Responders, and travel with a satellite phone and first-aid materials. Field staff and Trip Coordinators will reinforce safety guidelines throughout the trip. If there is an incident, the GCY office staff will work with guides to organize support. If you are nervous about any aspect of the expedition, please contact us for more information.

What is the weather going to be like?

The weather in the Southwest is as unpredictable as the place itself. Prepare for all kinds of weather, and to be outside all day every day. Your expedition could be hot and sunny, cold and drizzly, or both! Pack layers to help you adjust to the range of temperatures and conditions. You can check the weather prior to your expedition by searching the forecast for **Phantom Ranch, Arizona**.

Find more Frequently Asked Questions at: www.gcyouth.org/expeditions/individual-expeditions/#FAQs

Packing for Your GCY Expedition

Upper Grand Canyon

How to Pack

You only need to bring **one bag** for this expedition. All of your personal items should be packed into a **plastic trash/yard bag, pillow case, or soft gym bag** labeled with your name. It should be about 30 to 50 liters in volume. Pack ALL of your belongings into it.

GCY will provide a waterproof dry bag or "blueberry" for your sleep kit (also provided by GCY) and personal items. You will have access to this bag at every camp.

While on the river, GCY will also provide a small dry bag and a small daypack (school-style pack) to keep with you during the day. You will use these for items you need to access during the day like water bottles, sunscreen, lip balm, any daytime medications, rain gear, etc. Keep in mind that things in your day pack may get wet.

On the last evening on the river, GCY guides will provide you with a sturdy adjustable backpack to pack all your personal belongings for the hike out. **You will be expected to carry ALL of your personal gear out of the Canyon, so remember to pack as lightly as possible.**



Left: Your personal items will be packed into a dry bag, then rolled and buckled to ensure the contents stay dry.

Right: A sturdy adjustable backpack will be provided to pack out your belongings. Remember to pack light!

**Bags are not to scale*

GCY will provide...

A Personal Flotation Device (PFD), river helmet, dry bags for your personal gear, small daypack, larger backpack, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, and ground tarp. Tents are available, but most groups will sleep out under the stars! Other gear coming along includes boats, a full kitchen, an outdoor bathroom ("groover"), all food and snacks, drinking water, first aid supplies, and a kit of games, books, and art supplies.

Borrowing from GCY

Please check with GCY before purchasing any items: we have many items available to borrow at our warehouse, including river shoes and rain gear. We know that kids grow quickly, and purchasing outdoor gear can be expensive. Stop by GCY to try things on; otherwise, we can set you up on day one!

Do Not Bring

If you do not see an item on the Equipment List, it is because **we have intentionally left it off**. Avoid bringing heavy clothing, towels, jeans, nice shoes, or leather boots. GCY expeditions are intentionally technology-free, so please do not bring any electronics (cell phones, gaming devices, headphones, etc.). Anything you bring may get lost or ruined! Also, leave behind all money, wallets, and other valuables (if traveling independently, bring enough money for your meals, a post-expedition shower, and incidental expenses). GCY will provide plenty of food and snacks, so unless you have discussed the topic with GCY due to food allergies/intolerances, please **leave all food and drinks** at home as well.

We will meet in Flagstaff for a brief orientation and gear check before traveling to Lees Ferry to camp. Please arrive wearing items from the following packing list.

Upper Canyon Packing List

Medications

- ★ **Please bring TWO SETS of any prescription and/or critical medications** (inhalers, Epi-pens, daily medications, etc.). One set will stay with you, and the other will be stored by your guides.
 - **REMINDER: Youth must be able to manage and administer their own medications.**
- ★ **Additional personal medications:** over-the-counter medications or supplements as needed.

Pack in one plastic trash/yard waste bag, pillow case, or soft gym bag:

- ❑ **River shoes:** 1 pair of sport sandals with a thick sole and heel strap, such as Texas, Chacos, or Keens.
- ❑ **Athletic shoes:** 1 pair of running/P.E. shoes with good traction for hiking. Should be well worn-in, but sturdy. You will be hiking out of the canyon in them. We do not recommend heavy hiking boots.
- ❑ **Camp shoes:** 1 pair of flip flops, crocs, or other lightweight, comfortable shoes to wear at camp.
- ❑ **Quick-dry shorts:** Should be made of nylon or fast-drying material (not cotton!). Athletic shorts, swim trunks, or leggings all work well. Bring 2-3.
- ❑ **Sun shirts/Sun hoodies:** Long-sleeved, lightweight, cotton shirts are ideal for sun protection. Think button-up dress shirts. Wearing shirts is required. Bring 2-3.
- ❑ **Sports Bras:** 2-3 recommended. We recommend dark sports bras instead of bathing suits for comfort reasons. If you choose to bring a bathing suit, please be sure it does not tie in the back.
- ❑ **Sarong / lightweight cotton pants:** Bring 1 for sun protection and cooling off. Lightweight scarves or hospital scrub bottoms work well.
- ❑ **Socks:** Bring 2-3 pairs.
- ❑ **Underwear:** Bring 4-5 pairs.
- ❑ **Pajamas:** Bring 1 set of a T-shirt and lightweight pants or shorts to sleep in.
- ❑ **Lightweight fleece jacket:** Bring 1.
- ❑ **Rain gear:** 1 Rain jacket (no ponchos) & 1 pair of rain pants (yes, even in summer).
- ❑ **Bandana:** Bring 1 to wet and tie around your neck, under your hat to keep cool, or use as a washcloth.
- ❑ **Sun hat:** With a large brim and chin strap. Wearing a hat is required.
- ❑ **Sunglasses and retention device (strap):** Chums or Croakies, for example.
- ❑ **Eyeglasses:** If needed. If you wear contacts, bring an extra set and backup glasses, just in case. MUST have a retention device/strap for eyeglasses (Chums or Croakies, for example).
- ❑ **Water bottles:** 2 Nalgene-type screw-top plastic bottles. You need at least 2 liters. Camelbaks or other hydration packs are not recommended.
- ❑ **Locking Carabiners:** 2 metal clips (at least 3 inches long and locking) that let you attach your day bag and water bottle to boats. Find them at outdoor shops. Do not need to be climbing grade.
- ❑ **Sunscreen:** At least a 6 oz. bottle with high SPF. Do not bring spray sunscreen.
- ❑ **Lip balm/Chapstick:** must have SPF.
- ❑ **Personal toiletries:** Toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, conditioner, period care products (tampons with cardboard or no applicators are suggested), skin lotion (8-16 oz - the desert is dry!) Choose travel-size and biodegradable products when available.
- ❑ **Biodegradable or Castile Soap:** Good for doing laundry while on the river.
- ❑ **Headlamp:** Pack it with a new set of batteries.
- ❑ **Waterproof disposable camera:** (optional) Large or expensive cameras are not recommended.
- ❑ **Small journal and pen or pencil:** (optional).
- ❑ **Pillowcase/Small Travel Pillow:** There is no room for a regular pillow in your bag. We recommend stuffing extra clothes into a pillowcase to create a substitute.
- ❑ **Plastic bags:** (optional) These can separate dirty and clean clothes in your camp bag.
- ❑ **Money (if traveling):** You do not need money while on expedition, but bring enough to cover your meals, a post-expedition shower, and incidental expenses if you are traveling independently.