



Day 2- Southwest Utah- Sample Pages

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Hiking The Narrows in Zion National Park

A 3-10 mile RT trail that will take 2-8 hours, depending on how far you hike and how fast the river is flowing. *** Start Early!



Crossing the Virgin River while hiking The Narrows. The flow rate was 45 cfs this day.

The [Narrows](#) is one of the most iconic trails in Zion and one of our favorite trails in the world. You are basically hiking in the Virgin River for several miles as it flows through a deep canyon, which means there are photo ops worthy of National Geographic covers at every bend, but also that there are some very real dangers.

We recommend doing a little research beforehand because there are some serious warnings about hiking The Narrows. The lengthy descriptions below have everything we found useful before our hike. We gathered a ton of information because we like knowing what to expect and what to pack for. And we just like researching things.

Despite the challenging nature of the hike and having to do some advance planning and packing, The Narrows was everyone's favorite activity in Zion. The kids are still talking about. We would put it at the top of any list of activities you want to do in the park.

Even if you have small kids, we would still say do it as you can hike as much or as little as you want. If you only make it half a mile upriver to Mystery Canyon, it is still a really cool hike that is unlike any other that we have ever done. So do a little planning, be prepared, check the weather, and go for it!



Trail Description

Take the shuttle from the Visitor Center to the **Temple of Sinawava** where the trailhead is located. There are good bathrooms at the Temple of Sinawava. Use them. The shuttles start at 6am (7am in fall and spring) and it's about a 45 min ride. Be on the first buses.

The first mile of the trail is on the paved [Riverside Walk](#), which is very pretty in the early morning before the hordes of people arrive. And sometimes you can see wildlife. As the name implies, it follows along the Virgin River. This is a doable trail for most anybody, including strollers and wheelchairs.

Riverside Walk ends at a pebbly beach on the Virgin River and at this point you begin your wading. After about ½ mile, you will see **Mystery Falls** on your right, so named because of the water flowing down this side of the canyon.



Riverside Walk

Keep going another mile upriver from Mystery Falls and you will enter **Wall Street**. Now the canyon walls get much more narrow and the “wow” factor amps up even more.

Orderville Canyon is on your right and you can detour up it about a half mile to **Veiled Falls** for more fantastic photos and fun rock- scrambling.

After the junction with Orderville Canyon, you can keep going approximately another 2.5 miles up the Virgin River to **Big Spring** where day hikers (like you) must turn- around. Turning around here makes the hike about 10 miles RT.



Map courtesy of the NPS with our own additions



The sun rising on Mystery Falls

We never made it all the way to Big Spring, turning around at the junction with Orderville Canyon to make our hike just under 6 miles RT, including a short detour into Orderville Canyon. It would have been about 5.2 miles RT had we not explored up Orderville Canyon.

Our not quite 6 mile round-trip hike took us about 4.5 hours with quite a few snack breaks. Our hiking speed was a pretty average speed as we were not passed by many people but also did not pass many people ourselves. We took some long breaks though, especially on the way back to let feet warm up.

To Sum up the Mileage of the Different Sections of The Narrows

- It is roughly 5 miles from beginning to end (Temple of Sinawava shuttle stop to Big Spring), not including a detour up Orderville Canyon.
- Riverside Walk - 1 mile from the shuttle stop to where the trail enters the river.
- 0.5 mile from the end of Riverside Walk to Mystery Falls.
- 1.1 miles from Mystery Falls to the beginning of Wall Street and Orderville Canyon confluence on your right
- You can explore about 0.5 miles up Orderville Canyon to Veiled Falls before seeing a NPS sign telling you to turn around.
- 2.5 miles from the beginning of Wall Street to Big Spring where day hikers must turn- around.



Orderville Canyon



Things To Know About The Narrows

The Trail Is The River For Most Of It And Hiking Up A River Is Hard

The current is against you and the footing is very slippery. Even the return trip downriver isn't a breeze as you are still searching for footing.

The Virgin River Is In A Canyon. There Is No "Out" Except At The Trailhead

This may seem a bit obvious but we think it stands reiterating. If you get tired, you must hike back the way you came, but more importantly, if you get caught by a flash flood, there is nowhere to go. Always check with the National Park Service for current advisories before you get on the trail.

Check The Flow Rate

Look on the [US Geological Survey's website](#) for the graph showing discharge in cubic feet per second for the North Fork Virgin River. Anything below 100 cfs is okay for hiking but look for below 50 cfs if you are hiking with children.

We hiked the trail with twin 8 year olds, a 10 year old, and a 12 year old, when the flow rate was around 45 cfs (on July 5th). That was just high enough for the kids to be a challenge but still fun. We had to help them at several spots though as the water level was up to the twins' waists at times. Any higher and we would have all tired out before we got to Wall Street. The water is also cold, so the level really matters if you are only 4 feet tall.

Think About Renting Gear

After much reading, we decided to skip renting canyoning shoes and just wear our Keens. While the footing wasn't bad, the temperature was. Two of the kids had uncomfortably cold feet by the end and we wish we had rented the neoprene socks, if not the shoes themselves.

[Zion Outfitter](#) in Springdale (near the pedestrian bridge to the Visitor Center) has gear, as do many of the other outfitters in town. Look online for package deals.

You Will Want Hiking Sticks

The stick helps you keep your balance in the fast moving water and gives you some support when your foot slips off a rock. And it will slip off a rock, that's a promise. Even if you don't like hiking with a stick or pole, do it for this trail.

We got to the trailhead early enough that there were a pile of very nice sticks left from the day before and the 6 of us each got one. Sticks also come with a shoe rental package. One kid did better without his stick but the rest of us did much better with them. Err on the side of getting one.

Bring Water, Food, And A Jacket

This last bit may seem unnecessary in the summer but it isn't. The sun never steadily shone on us in the canyon until we were on the last mile out. The water is cold even in the summer and we were glad of our long-sleeved shirts and hats.

Because it is not that warm if you start early, you may not need as much water as you do in other parts of the Zion. We brought 1.5 liters per person and dumped 0.5L each on the way back. ***We also did not hike the whole trail so you may need more water than we did.



The Time Of Year Matters

Winter is obviously freezing but uncrowded, while spring can have dangerously high water levels due to snowmelt and the trail will most likely be closed. Summer brings low water levels but also hazardous afternoon thundershowers. Fall has colder temperatures and higher water levels.

Every time of year has benefits and drawbacks. The outfitters in Springdale can set you up with dry suits if fall/ winter hiking sounds appealing.

Be Aware Of Flash Flood Risks

Check with the Wilderness Desk at the Zion Visitor Center the day before your hike. Thunderstorms miles away can lead to flash floods in the canyon so check the weather just before you leave your hotel (and leave cell service as there is none in the canyon). If the water changes from clear to muddy while you are on the trail or starts rising at all, head back immediately.

Start Early

This is “the trail” people come to Zion to hike (along with Angel’s Landing but without the nausea-inducing heights). By late morning, the first section to Mystery Falls resembles an amusement park, complete with crowds. An early start also lessens your chance of being caught in a flash flood as thunderstorms are typically in the afternoon.

We arrived at the trailhead around 7am with a full shuttle bus but the people quickly spaced out on the trail. We got some great pictures of just us and the river. By the time we got back to the trailhead around 1130am though, we had to wind our way through the throngs of people.

Bring Dry Bags

Even if the water is low, there is a good chance you will eat it on a rock and go face first into the water with your backpack. This is one of the most gorgeous hikes we have ever done so you will want to bring your fanciest camera and you will want that dry bag for it. Snacks also taste better not soggy. The kids’ backpacks got really wet while the adults managed to stay dry for the most part. But not completely.

Use The Bathrooms At The Temple Of Sinawava Shuttle Stop

It is your only chance unless you pee in the river. Which everyone does. There are no secluded spots in a canyon.

Leave No Trace And Do Not Alter The Trail

Packing out your trash is obvious to most people but “leave no trace” also means no rock cairns, no writing your name anywhere (even in mud), and no taking a pebble home as a souvenir. Thousands of people hike this trail every year so you can see how small actions can multiply to ruin this iconic trail for future generations.

Additional Websites To Peruse For More Information

[Joe’s Guide to Zion National Park](#) has some good descriptions of the trail, pictures, and advice. [Zion Guru](#) Outfitters has a good description, map, and an awesome graphic of how different flow rates will affect different sized hikers on their website.



Lunch Day 2

Bring a picnic to enjoy on the trail (there are occasional areas along the edge of the river that are large enough to stop and sit on the rocks out of the water, especially if the flow rate is low).

Stop at the Castle Dome Cafe at Zion Lodge for a celebratory beer and ice cream if you had lunch on the trail.

Head back to Springdale for a well- deserved feast if you only brought granola bars for the trail. See the section on *Where to Eat in Zion and Springdale* for restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon Day 2

Optional Activities

Chill out at your lodgings with a great book for some well- deserved down time after your big hike.

Go for a bike ride or tube down the Zion River (if you aren't tired of seeing it yet).

See if there is a youth program on at the Nature Center.

Visit the [Zion Human History Museum](#) for its interesting 22 min video introducing the park and its history. This is a particularly good option for any summer afternoon as the museum has A/C.

Souvenir shop around Springdale.

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