

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Why Are People Still Dying at the Grand Canyon?

Our Friends · Friday, December 15th, 2023

The Grand Canyon is one of the most famous and popular U.S. National Parks, due to its awe-inducing size and beauty. Millions travel to the Grand Canyon every year to take stunning photos, hike, and boat down the river. Due to the sheer number of people who visit this park, it's no surprise that people die there. With steep rocky cliffs, extreme heat, and rapid rivers, it can be easy to underestimate just how dangerous this beautiful place is. There are an average of **12 deaths at the Grand Canyon each year**, and that number is not wavering. Let's explore some of the factors that contribute to these tragedies and understand how they can be prevented.



### Unstable Terrain & Risky Behavior

Those who are unfamiliar with the Grand Canyon's terrain can gravely misunderstand it. Warnings to stay on the designated paths should be taken seriously, as those are the only areas that have been deemed safe to walk on. Taking just a few steps off the path could lead you onto unstable terrain.

While some park visitors make small and understandable mistakes like stepping off the path for a photo, others push boundaries. Many people engage in risky behavior around the edge of the canyon for the sake of seeing the view, getting the best photo, or having a laugh. Unfortunately, this overconfidence can often lead to deadly falls.

In 1992, Greg Austin Gingrich decided to prank his daughter by pretending to jump down into the canyon, planning to land safely on the guard wall. Instead, he misjudged the distance and actually fell, plummeting 400 feet to his death. Increased signage to promote safety can help reduce these

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fatal falls, as well as people making better decisions.

### **Extreme Heat and Inadequate Hydration**

Most people know about Arizona's reputation for heat, but many are unaware of the increased heat within the Grand Canyon. Even if the top of the canyon doesn't feel too hot, hiking down into the canyon can bring you to **temperatures of up to 120 degrees**. No amount of preparation or bravery can help prevent heat-related illnesses like heat stroke and dehydration. Many hikers greatly underestimate just how much water consumption is needed to stay safe in those temperatures. Anyone adventuring into the canyon needs to be aware of the proper amount of water they need to bring.

### **The Role of Salty Snacks**

In addition to staying hydrated, it's equally as important to eat salty snacks when hiking in extreme heat. Many hikers don't properly understand the body's electrolyte balance. By eating salty snacks along the way, hikers can keep their sodium levels balanced. Otherwise, you risk overhydrating – drinking too much water without balancing out your blood's sodium levels. Proper education and awareness campaigns are necessary to teach hikers about balanced nutrition before they venture off into the canyon in the heat.

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