

Grand Canyon

1. Why do people visit the Grand Canyon?
2. What impact has the Grand Canyon West project had on the area?
3. Was the Grand Canyon West Project sustainable?

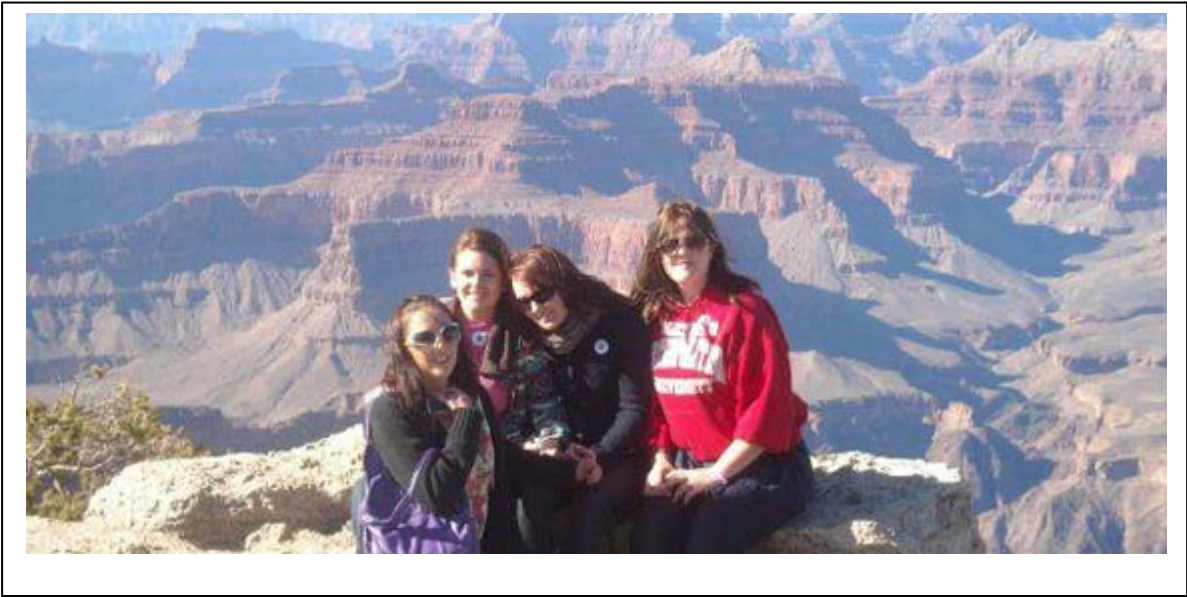
Tab 1

Question - Why do people visit the Grand Canyon?

IMAGES –









INFORMATION –

The Grand Canyon in Arizona, USA is one of the world's most iconic natural attractions. The canyon covers about 2,000 square miles and is nearly 300 miles long. It is up to 18 miles wide and 5,000 feet deep in places.

The Grand Canyon has been shaped by the Colorado River, which has cut down through layers of rock for over a million years. Much of the edge (rim) of the canyon is inaccessible desert. The two major locations at which visitors can access the canyon are the South Rim and North Rim National Parks. The North Rim is over 8,000 feet above sea level. This means that the area receives a large amount of snowfall in winter, so is closed for up to 6 months of the year. The South Rim is lower (about 7,000 feet above seal level) and so is open all year round.



Tab 2

Question - What impact has the Grand Canyon West project had on the area?

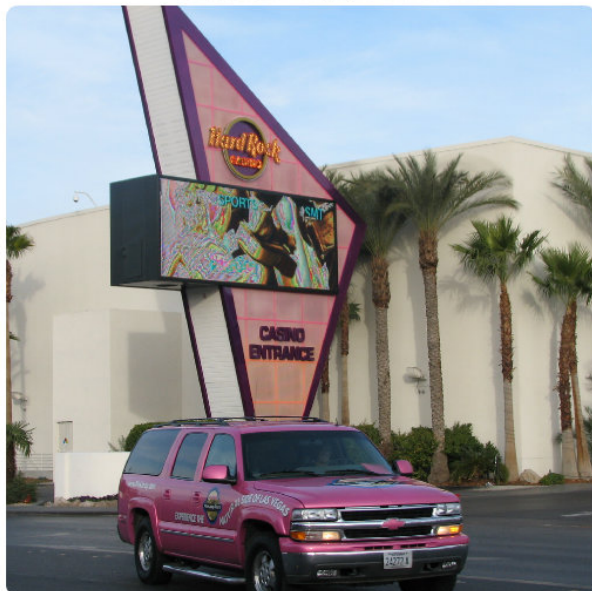
INFORMATION –

The Grand Canyon West Project

'The main aim of the Grand Canyon West Project was to open up an area of the Grand Canyon much closer to Las Vegas. This would enable more people visiting Las Vegas to get to the Grand Canyon and back in one day (The resort of Las Vegas is less than a three hour drive from Grand Canyon West)

A great advantage of the location of Grand Canyon West was that it is relatively accessible from Las Vegas. Grand Canyon West, located within the Hualapai Indian Reservation, is less than 3 hours by car from Las Vegas, but the more scenic Grand Canyon National Park, at the south rim of the canyon is nearly 5 hours by car.

This means that until recently it was not easy to visit the South Rim National Park in one day from Las Vegas by road. However, some visitors could afford to fly to the Grand Canyon from Las Vegas by small plane or helicopter.



The Hualapai Indian tribe

The Grand Canyon West project, to develop a section of the tribal lands occupied by The Hualapai (pronounced WAL-A-PIE) tribe in Arizona was originally seen as a good example of sustainable tourism. The tribe lives in an arid area of the 'canyon lands' of the South West USA that includes a section of the Grand Canyon. The tribe had poor living conditions and high levels of unemployment. The Grand Canyon West project was seen as a way of developing a section of the tribe's territories for tourism as a means of generating income and preserving the traditional way of life of the Hualapai.

The Hualapai tribe formed a partnership with a Las Vegas businessman, David Jin, who funded the development of Grand Canyon West. The most ambitious feature of the project was the construction of the Skywalk, which allowed visitors to walk on a glass-bottomed structure overlooking the Grand Canyon and look down at the Colorado River below.

Local people, members of the Hualapai tribe, have been employed in a variety of jobs, including as bus drivers, customer service agents and as guides.

Income gained from tourist visits to the Grand Canyon West development and the Skywalk was planned to be invested in the Hualapai nation.



It can be argued that the original idea of the Grand Canyon West had a number of sustainable features. These included:-

Economic sustainability

The Hualapai people have gained economically in a number of ways. They have been employed as drivers, in the shops, canteen and at other locations within the Grand Canyon West development. Also, the women of the Hualapai tribe have been able to make and sell traditional jewellery to the many tourists who have visited the complex.

Ecological sustainability

The Hualapai have agreed that only a small fraction of their lands will be opened to tourism development, some 7,000 out of 100,000 square miles. The remaining lands will not be developed and will therefore be protected and the ecological balance maintained.

Local sustainability

One of the benefits of the income received from tourism is that the Hualapai have been able to invest in projects for the young people of the tribe, helping to ensure that they remain with the tribe rather than leave to find work elsewhere. These projects include clubs for the clubs for young people and other social facilities. It is important to understand that before the Grand Canyon West development the majority of the Hualapai had a very low standard of living with few services.

Cultural sustainability

Visitors to the Grand Canyon West complex have been able to learn a great deal about the traditional way of life of the Native American tribes such as the Hualapai. Traditional buildings have been erected and the tribe performs dances and music for the tourists, thus maintaining the culture.

Tab 3

Question - Was the Grand Canyon West Project sustainable?

INFORMATION –

What has gone wrong?

The Grand Canyon West development and Skywalk project have proved to be controversial in a number of ways. Many people have argued against the construction of such a prominent feature overlooking the rim of the Grand Canyon. The Hualapai people are now engaged in an ongoing dispute with the developer who financed the project, and many visitors complain of being over-charged.



The newspaper extract of the below gives an indication of the problems which have arisen.

'When the Hualapapai tribe opened up the Skywalk on their land on western rim of the Grand Canyon in 2007, there was hope that the glass-bottomed bridge would bring prosperity to the small Northern Arizona tribe. But four years later, the tribe is now immersed in an escalating dispute with the developer who financed the project and manages the attraction.

There are accusations of breach of contract and transgressions on both sides. But both sides can agree that the Skywalk is drawing tourists.

On an afternoon in the middle of the week, hundreds of tourists wait their turn to stroll on the glass bridge. An usher keeping track of the visitors has counted more than 1450 visitors on her shift. In 2010, some 620,000 tourists visited. Each one paid \$29.99 just to enter the Skywalk, and many will fork over another \$27.99 to take home a photo. Most come by bus or helicopter on package tours.

"It's breathtaking really, it's unbelievable," said Melissa Peck, a tourist from New Jersey as she gazed down at the bottom of the canyon, 4,000 feet below.

The structure was built when Las Vegas businessman David Jin struck a deal with the Hualapai tribe. He would put up \$30 million to build the Skywalk and a Visitor Center, and then would manage the site for the next 25 years. The profits would be split evenly between Jin's corporation, Grand Canyon Skywalk Development, LLC, and the tribe's corporation, 'Sa' Nyu Wa. But now both sides say the other isn't keeping up their end of the bargain. The Hualapai's main grievance is the unfinished visitor center.

The line of tourists winds through the unfinished building on the way to the Skywalk entrance. The exterior of the building is complete, but inside it looks like a construction zone. Hualapai Tribal Council member Waylon Honga stands in front of bags of insulation that have yet to be installed in the unfinished visitor center.

"There's no ceiling, there's no interior walls, It is one big empty space," said Honga, as he toured the empty space that is supposed to house a restaurant and a gift shop for tourists. "It's got a long ways to go."

Honga and the rest of the council insist the unfinished construction is Jin's fault.

"What is stipulated in the contract was for Mr. Jin to extend the water, the sewer and electric lines and complete the building," the councilman said. "And it hasn't been done."

Jin maintains that the utilities are the tribe's responsibility.'

INFORMATION –

Mixed Reviews

Some of the visitors to Grand Canyon West have been very disappointed and feel that they have been over-charged. Others have had a good experience. The question remains as to whether or not the destination has achieved its sustainable aims or whether the project has become too commercial. There are many reviews and comments about the Grand Canyon West and Skywalk development available on the internet. For example, sites and blogs such as You Tube and Trip Advisor will provide a range of comments.

The review below is very positive.

'After visiting Grand Canyon West and the Hualapai people, peering over the canyon's edge and experiencing the thrill of flying in to the airstrip over beautiful Arizona canyonlands, I have to say the prices, which appear high on first glance, are worth it when you consider the importance of tourism to the Hualapai people.

The Skywalk and the tourist facilities at Grand Canyon West represent the dreams of the Tribe for a financially secure future. All the Tribe has are these beautiful lands. In order to make money, this impoverished Tribe must find a way to use the land. They have chosen to open their lands and hospitality to the world and thus ensure a future for themselves and their children. In my book, a visit to the unusual Grand Canyon West is a good addition to a South-west vacation.'



This one is not!

'After spending 3 hours driving from Las Vegas to the Skywalk, being greeted by a 9 mile dirt road, we arrived at the main terminal; this is where the total rip off begins! Just to access the bus to the skywalk you have to pay a minimum of \$50 per person for their cheapest package. When we asked for the price for just the bus to the sky walk, we were told it was not possible. At that point we paid over the odds for a bottle of water in their shop and took the plunge with their cheapest entrance fee!

There was a long queue for the Skywalk (Which was \$30 more per person, up to \$80+ per person now!) and it was nothing special at all, not only that, they don't even let you take your camera! Their excuse was that I might drop it. So our only option was to pay \$30 for one of their photos, NO THANKS! The view was not even that good the surrounding area had the same view and they were free!

Other than the Skywalk being a really big disappointment, the other areas we tried were so fake they were not even worth looking at. Stay away from this Tourist Trap and spend your money on something you would really like to remember!



INFORMATION –

Sustainable or not?

The Grand Canyon West and Skywalk project have become very controversial because of the dispute between the Hualapai people and the developers. At the same time, poor reviews about the Skywalk experience, over-pricing and the difficulties in accessing the site have added to the controversy.

Because of these on-going issues, the sustainability of the Grand Canyon West Project has to be considered carefully.

Much has been written about the dispute between the Hualapai people and the developers and the impact of the Skywalk on the Grand Canyon landscape has been discussed in many newspapers and journals in the USA.

- <http://www.desertusa.com/mag07/sept07/skywalk.html>
- http://www.abc15.com/dpp/news/local_news/hear_me_out/does-tribe-have-legal-right-to-seize-control-of-grand-canyon-skywalk
- <http://writefunny.blogspot.com/2008/10/grand-canyon-skywalk.html>

- <http://www.examiner.com/day-trips-in-phoenix/visitors-guide-to-grand-canyon-west-and-the-skywalk>
- <http://www.examiner.com/day-trips-in-phoenix/visitors-guide-to-grand-canyon-west-and-the-skywalk>
- <http://www.latimes.com/la-na-skywalk11feb11,0,6435928.story>
- <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0410/p20s01-litr.html>
- <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/18/us-arizona-grandcanyon-dispute-idUSBRE82H08O20120318>

You might be able to find more interest articles using different search engines.