

Page & Antelope Canyon in Two Nights: Beat-the-Crowds Field Guide (September 15–17, 2026)

Two adults, one rental car from Flagstaff, a \$1,000 ceiling, and a very reasonable request: to see the "hidden gem" that 4 million of your closest friends also found. Good news, with smart timing and a couple of genuinely quieter backups, you can still have the canyon feel like yours for a few minutes. Here is the whole plan, timed, priced, and honest about where the crowds and the budget will bite.

o) Your details at a glance

Item	Detail
Dates	Tuesday, September 15 to Thursday, September 17, 2026 (2 nights, both weeknights)
Group	2 adults
Budget	Up to \$1,000 total
Lodging wish	In Page, simple and clean
Must-haves	Antelope Canyon tour, Horseshoe Bend, Lake Powell, sunrise photos
Travel	Rental car, arriving from Flagstaff
Food	Casual, plus one good dinner in Page
Special request	Anti-crowd timing strategy, light-beam reality by season, quieter named alternatives (Waterholes Canyon, Alstrom Point) with drive times

1) At a glance

Element	The pick	Key facts (as of June 2026)
Canyon tour	Lower Antelope Canyon, Ken's Tours (official operator)	General Tour \$80.50/person incl. taxes & fees, 50–60 min
Alternative canyon	Upper Antelope Canyon, Antelope Canyon Navajo Tours	11:40 AM slot \$105 + \$15 permit = \$120/person
Quiet backup	Waterhole Canyon Experience LLC (Navajo-owned)	Tours ~\$75–\$132/person + \$8 Navajo permit, max 12 guests
Horseshoe Bend	City of Page overlook	\$10 per private vehicle, open sunrise to sunset

Element	The pick	Key facts (as of June 2026)
Lake Powell	Wahweap / Antelope Point marinas + overlooks	Glen Canyon fee \$30/vehicle, valid 7 days
Sunrise spot	Wahweap Overlook or Horseshoe Bend	Free (Horseshoe Bend gate opens at sunrise)
Lodging	Rodeway Inn at Lake Powell, Page	Peak-season rates typically \$180–\$220+/night for mid-Sept, plus tax; verify exact rate at booking
One good dinner	Big John's Texas BBQ	153 S Lake Powell Blvd, daily 11:00 AM–9:00 PM
Drive in	Flagstaff to Page via US-89 N	~125 miles, about 2 hours 15 minutes

1b) Recommendation and the best alternative

Recommended: Lower Antelope Canyon with Ken's Tours, booked for an early-morning weekday slot. Here is the honest reasoning. Your dates are two weeknights in shoulder season, which is already your biggest crowd advantage. Upper Antelope, "The Crack," is the most-visited slot canyon in the American Southwest and the most-photographed in the world, so it is also the most jammed and the pricier of the two. Lower Antelope gives you the same jaw-dropping sandstone with more elbow room and a lower price, and Ken's is one of only two authorized operators on the Lower side. At \$80.50 per person including taxes and fees for the 50 to 60 minute General Tour, with groups up to 15, two of you come in at about \$161 total, which protects your budget.

Best alternative: Upper Antelope Canyon with Antelope Canyon Navajo Tours (navajotours.com). If light beams are the whole reason you came, Upper is where they happen. Upper Canyon is famous for its vertical light beams, typically visible around midday during peak seasons, because the wide openings above let sunlight reach the canyon floor. Expect to pay more: the 11:40 tour time is \$105 plus a \$15 Navajo permit, which equals \$120 per person, so roughly \$240 for two. That is a big chunk of a \$1,000 trip, hence Upper is the alternative rather than the default.

The light-beam reality by season (important): the classic shafts of light are a high-sun phenomenon. Beams of direct sunlight are much more common in Upper Antelope, they occur most often in summer because they require the sun to be high in the sky, and winter colors are more muted. Mid-September sits at the tail end of good beam season, and the best light beams appear throughout the whole year between 10:30 AM and 1:30 PM, though September beams are shorter-lived and less vertical than in June or July. Translation: in mid-September you have a real shot at beams if you book an Upper tour in the 11:00 AM–1:00 PM window, but do not treat them as guaranteed. If beams are non-negotiable, book Upper's midday slot; if it is the canyon experience and crowd-avoidance you care about, Lower in the early morning wins.

💡 You cannot do both canyons back to back on a whim: combo tours of Upper plus Lower require departure times separated by a minimum interval of three hours.

1c) Book now (do this well before you leave)

What	By when	Where / link
Lower Antelope Canyon, Ken's Tours (early slot)	2–4 weeks ahead; sooner for Sept	lowerantelope.com/...
OR Upper Antelope, Navajo Tours (midday for beams)	ASAP; slots released only 1–2 months in advance	navajotours.com/...
Waterhole Canyon (quiet backup)	2–4 weeks ahead	grandcanyon.com/...
Rodeway Inn at Lake Powell, Page	Now (peak season fills)	choicehotels.com/...
Rental car pickup, Flagstaff	Now	Your chosen agency

For every hotel and tour above: **You will see the binding price for your exact dates and occupancy at the provider's booking step, it changes daily.**

💡 Set Page time correctly on your phone before dawn shoots. Page, Arizona follows Mountain Standard Time (MST, UTC-7) year-round, so it does not observe daylight saving like the rest of Arizona's clocks may suggest on apps. Missing a tour by an hour is the classic Page rookie error, and no refunds or reschedules are issued for no-shows and late arrivals, with check-in required 45 minutes before departure.

2) Day-by-day plan

Day 1, Tuesday, September 15: Flagstaff to Page, first light-bend of the plan

- **Late morning:** Pick up your rental car in Flagstaff and drive north on US-89. It is roughly 125 miles, about 2 hours 15 minutes. Top off fuel and grab road snacks in Flagstaff, since prices climb the closer you get to Page.
- **Early afternoon:** Arrive in Page, check in at the Rodeway Inn at Lake Powell, drop bags. A \$100 damage deposit is collected by credit card on arrival and reimbursed after check-out, so budget for that hold.
- **Mid-afternoon:** Warm-up cruise to a Lake Powell overlook. Drive to Wahweap Overlook near the Glen Canyon Dam for your first big-water view. Entering the recreation area, there is a \$30 Glen Canyon park fee that admits one single, private, non-commercial vehicle and all its passengers and is valid for 7 days, so keep the receipt for the rest of your stay.
- **Evening, your one good dinner: Big John's Texas BBQ**, 153 S Lake Powell Blvd. Big John's is open seven days a week 11:00 AM to 9:00 PM, it is casual Texas barbecue, and you are looking at spending about \$15 per person for just food. A remodeled old gas station with live music every night from 6:30 PM to 9 PM, exactly the "casual but genuinely good" vibe you asked for. Phone 928-645-3300. Note they do not accept reservations, it is first-come, first-served, so factor in a possible wait at peak (standard US tipping is 15 to 20 percent).

💡 Two solid dinner alternatives if Big John's has a wait (a common complaint at peak): **State 48 Tavern** and the **Iron Horse Restaurant**, both in Page. Call ahead to confirm hours before you head over.

Plan B (weather): If afternoon monsoon storms roll in (mid-September can still see them), skip the overlook and visit the Powell Museum in town or do an early dinner, then scout Horseshoe Bend's parking lot so tomorrow's pre-dawn drive is familiar.

Day 2, Wednesday, September 16: The big canyon-and-bend day, timed against crowds

- **Sunrise (~6:15 AM MST, confirm the exact time locally):** Drive to **Horseshoe Bend** for first light. It sits about 5 miles south of the Carl Hayden Visitor Center, open sunrise to sunset, roughly 11 minutes from your hotel. Parking is \$10 per vehicle. **This is your emptiest window by a mile.** The overlook faces such that morning light is soft and side-lit, and the tour-bus crowds have not arrived yet.
- **Mid-morning canyon tour:** Head to your booked **Lower Antelope Canyon, Ken's Tours** slot. Ken's is at Ken's Tours, Indian Rte 222, Page, AZ 86040, phone 928-645-6997, a few minutes east of town. Aim for the earliest morning departure you can get: early slots are cooler, less crowded, and beat the midday tour-bus surge. The General Tour runs 50 to 60 minutes.
- **Midday:** Late casual lunch in town (grab-and-go, or a picnic by the lake). Remember the Navajo entry math: the entry fee is \$15 per person, per location, per day, already bundled into Ken's ticket price.
- **Afternoon, Lake Powell time:** Drive to **Antelope Point Marina**, which is located just minutes from Page and is away from the crowds for a more peaceful experience. Wander the floating restaurant/marina, or simply enjoy the water views. If you want to be on the water, note that the big Wahweap-based **Antelope Canyon boat tour is currently unavailable:** the Antelope Canyon Tour is unavailable until further notice, so check the operator page before counting on any boat cruise.
- **Evening:** Casual dinner or leftovers, early night for tomorrow.

💡 Crowd timing cheat sheet: for the canyon, **first tour of the morning on a weekday** is the least crowded, midday is peak (and, on Upper, peak beam-time so peak everything). For Horseshoe Bend, **sunrise is emptiest**, late morning through early evening is a zoo, and sunset is beautiful but packed. You have both nailed by front-loading your day.

Plan B (weather): Slot canyons close for flash-flood risk. Tours may be cancelled for flash-flood risk, with guests receiving rebooking or refunds. If your canyon tour is scrubbed, swap in a dam tour or the Antelope Point Marina afternoon, and rebook the canyon for Day 3 morning before you leave.

Day 3, Thursday, September 17: One last quiet gem, then roll out

- **Sunrise option A (easy, do this one):** Return to **Horseshoe Bend** or **Wahweap Overlook** for a final calm photo session before driving home.

- **Sunrise option B (the real hidden gem, for the adventurous only): Alstrom Point.** This is the genuine crowd-free Lake Powell overlook, but respect the access. From Page, Alstrom Point is a 42-mile drive that takes around 90 minutes to 2 hours depending on road conditions, and high-clearance 4WD is necessary for the last few miles, with high-clearance 2WD recommended for the entire drive. A standard rental car is not the right tool here. It takes around four hours to drive there and back, and you should only attempt it in dry weather or when the road has dried after rain. If you did not rent a high-clearance SUV, skip this and enjoy option A guilt-free.
- **Mid-morning:** Check out, quick coffee, drive back to Flagstaff on US-89 (about 2 hours 15 minutes).

💡 Quiet-canyon backup if Antelope was fully booked or you want more slot canyon without the mob:

Waterhole Canyon Experience LLC. It is 5.5 miles south of Page on US-89 at Milepost 541.5, Navajo-owned, and unlocks a quieter slot-canyon alternative to Antelope Canyon with small group tours limited to 12 guests. Pricing runs tours \$75 to \$132 plus an \$8 Navajo Nation permit. It is a short 15-minute drive from town and rarely feels crowded. Confirm the tour times and price at the booking step before you go.

Plan B (weather): If it is raining, do not attempt Alstrom Point or any slot canyon. Do the paved Wahweap Overlook, then head out early.

3) Practical notes, checklist, and cost overview

Practical notes

- **Book canyon tours before arrival.** Tours often sell out 2 to 4 weeks ahead in spring and fall, and Navajo Tours releases Upper slots only 1 to 2 months out. Do not gamble on walk-ups.
- **Guides are mandatory everywhere.** All areas of the Lake Powell Antelope Canyon locations are accessible only via guided tour, and tour guides are mandatory to all Antelope Canyon locations. Same for Waterholes now.
- **No tripods or bags in Upper Antelope.** Tripods and monopods are not allowed on tour anymore, and it is all hand-held photography, and clear bags only. Lower is similar. Bring a phone or small camera and plenty of water.
- **Cash-free lake facilities.** All Lake Powell locations operate as cash-free, accepting all major credit and debit cards.
- **Keep your Glen Canyon receipt.** The \$30 vehicle fee covers 7 days, so it is one payment for your whole visit.

Packing / prep checklist

- Confirmed tour vouchers (PDF) + photo ID for check-in
- Refillable water bottles (desert, no shade in canyons or at overlooks)
- Layers (canyons run cool), hat, sunblock, closed-toe shoes
- Phone set to MST, offline map downloaded (cell service is patchy south of town)
- Credit card for the \$100 hotel deposit hold and cash-free lake payments
- Full tank of gas leaving Flagstaff

Estimated cost overview vs. your \$1,000 budget

Item	Estimate (2 adults)	Notes
Lodging, 2 nights, Rodeway Inn at Lake Powell	\$360– \$440+	Peak-season mid-Sept rates ~\$180–\$220+/night; verify exact date price with the provider; plus tax; \$100 refundable deposit hold
Lower Antelope, Ken's Tours (2 × \$80.50)	~\$161	Includes taxes, fees, and Navajo entry
Horseshoe Bend parking	\$10	Per vehicle
Glen Canyon / Lake Powell vehicle fee	\$30	7-day vehicle pass
One good dinner, Big John's (2 people)	~\$40–\$55	Plus 15–20% tip
Other casual meals (2 days)	~\$90–\$120	Grab-and-go + one more sit-down
Fuel, Flagstaff round trip + local	~\$60–\$90	~250+ miles total in your rental
Running subtotal	~\$751– \$906	Under \$1,000, but tighter in peak season
Optional: swap/add Upper Antelope (2 × \$120)	+\$240	Would push you over \$1,000, so pick one canyon, not both

Budget verdict: your plan as recommended (Lower Antelope + the free/cheap overlooks) lands around **\$751–\$906**, so peak-season mid-September lodging is the line item that eats most of your cushion. Adding the Upper Antelope beam tour on top would tip you over \$1,000, so treat Upper as an either/or with Lower, or trim a meal. Rental-car cost itself is not included above since you are arranging that separately; keep an eye on it, as it is the one line item that can quietly blow the ceiling.

4) Sources

All pages checked June 2026.

Antelope Canyon tours and fees

- Ken's Tours (Lower Antelope, official): [lowerantelope.com/...](https://lowerantelope.com/)
- Antelope Canyon Navajo Tours (Upper, official): [navajotours.com/...](https://navajotours.com/)
- Navajo Nation Parks, Antelope Canyon operators & entry fee: [navajonationparks.org/...](https://navajonationparks.org/)
- Antelope Canyon Tours, Inc. (Upper operator): [antelopecanyon.com/...](https://antelopecanyon.com/)

Horseshoe Bend, Lake Powell, Glen Canyon

- Lake Powell Resorts & Marinas boat tours: [lakepowell.com/...](https://lakepowell.com/)

- Antelope Point Marina: antelopepointlakepowell.com
- Glen Canyon NRA fees (NPS): [nps.gov/...](https://nps.gov/)

Quiet alternatives

- Waterhole Canyon Experience LLC: [grandcanyon.com/...](https://grandcanyon.com/)
- Alstrom Point driving guide (NPS): [nps.gov/...](https://nps.gov/)
- Alstrom Point route & timing: [thewave.info/...](https://thewave.info/)

Lodging

- Rodeway Inn at Lake Powell (official brand site): [choicehotels.com/...](https://choicehotels.com/)
- Rodeway Inn at Lake Powell details: [expedia.com/...](https://expedia.com/)

Dining

- Big John's Texas BBQ (official): bigjohnstexasbbq.com
- Big John's hours & phone (official contact page): [bigjohnstexasbbq.com/...](https://bigjohnstexasbbq.com/)

Have a fantastic trip. The gem may be in every guidebook, but at 6:15 AM on a Wednesday, it will still feel like it is yours.

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