

Exploring the Wasatch

Recommendations for Salt Lake's Scenic Canyons



The Wasatch

Starting from the Utah-Idaho border, Utah's Wasatch Mountain Range runs 160 miles until it reaches central Utah. This lends itself to an almost limitless amount of leisure and recreation activity which can leave you feeling overwhelmed trying to narrow down which to try and explore first. Here's a short list of the places I believe everyone should try and see when spending time in our beUTAHful state.

Ensign Peak and the Surrounding Foothills

Just above downtown Salt Lake City and Temple Square sits Ensign Peak, which was used by Brigham Young to survey the canyons, mountains, and streams of the Salt Lake valley when the mormon pioneers were first emigrating out west.

At just over a mile round trip, the hike to Ensign peak is relatively short and easy, yet still offers panoramic views of the Salt Lake Valley. With its close proximity to Temple Square, Ensign Peak can easily be done the same day as a tour of Temple Square.

Ensign Peak is one of many shorter “summits” in the foothills, which have a wide variety of interconnecting trails to choose from. If a longer trail is what you’re looking for, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail, the Living Room Trail, or the Avenue Twin Peaks are all worth the extra effort.

Millcreek Canyon

As you travel south of downtown Salt Lake City, you’ll start making your way into some of our scenic canyons. Named for the numerous lumber mills that filled the canyon, Millcreek canyon has many different trails to branch out on.

The Pipeline Trail is a local favorite, as it has multiple starting points, includes both shaded areas and scenic vistas, and is relatively free of elevation gain and loss.

Grandeur Peak is one of the more prominent peaks overlooking the Salt Lake Valley and offers up stunning views of the valley and the Great Salt Lake. However, with 2,600 feet of elevation gain over 6.5 miles this is the most strenuous trail on this list. Fortunately there’s plenty of shade and places to stop, catch your breath, and enjoy the scenery.

Big Cottonwood Canyon

A uniquely beautiful waterfall that is as sweet as the name suggests, Donut Falls is a family friendly hike that is perfect for those who are looking for a quicker hike or would like to do multiple hikes the same day.

Nestled between Brighton and Solitude Ski Areas, Silver Lake is a splendid location for a hike paired with a picnic lunch. Part boardwalk and part trail, Silver Lake is surrounded by an interpretive trail with great views of the lake itself, the diverse vegetation, and is one of the areas we see the most wildlife! The twin lake trail connects to this trail as well for those that want a little more hiking and an extra lake!

Little Cottonwood Canyon

Don't let the fact that this lake is more well known than it's name would suggest stop you from visiting. Secret Lake (the miners that first settled the canyon weren't the best of spellers) is well known among Utahns for it's easy access, views of the surrounding peaks, and it's wildflowers that bloom in droves in the mid to late summer.

The Tram at Snowbird is one of the most iconic lifts in Utah, if not the entire country. Rising 3000 feet from the base area to Hidden Peak, it's one of the easiest yet ways to get to the splendid higher elevations of the Wasatch Mountains. Once at the top, you can enjoy views of Little Cottonwood Canyon and down into Mineral Basin. For those wanting more of a challenge, there are multiple intermediate to advanced hiking routes up from the base area. Once at the top, enjoy the views and then ride the tram back down!