

A Southern Utah Surprise

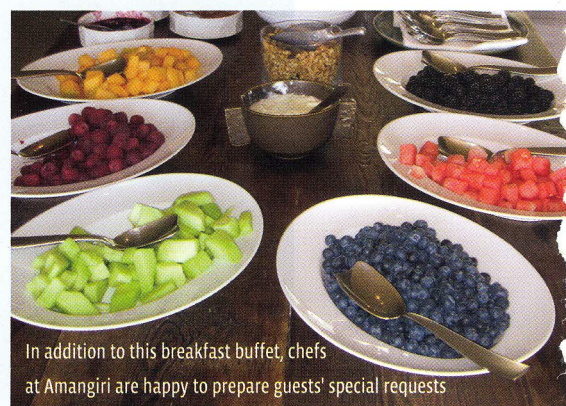
Am I the last person in San Diego to discover the scenic beauty of Southern Utah? Ever since my road trip through this area last month, I've been talking about the spectacular red rock mountains, sandstone summits, and desert wildflowers I saw, and — much to my chagrin — my friends and family aren't paying much attention. It seems everyone I know is already a fan of this rugged region.

Being the last to learn about a travel destination is a new experience for me and not one I'm enjoying. However, I am having fun describing the stunning place in which I stayed. It opened last October and is news even to those who are familiar with the territory.

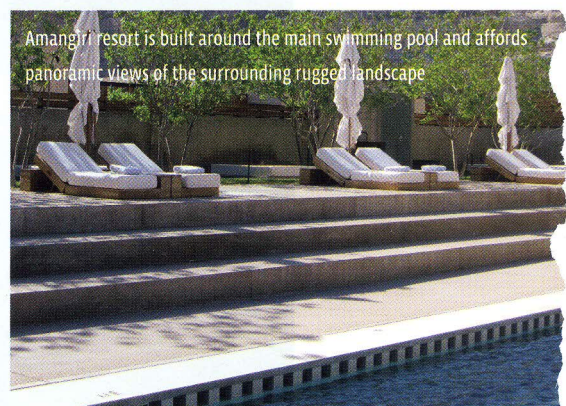
It took an Act of Congress to build Amangiri — the most recent addition to Amanresorts' string of small luxury hotels. The

company had purchased 600 acres in a protected valley near Lake Powell, but when Aman CEO Adrian Zecha hiked over the property, the building site he favored was adjacent — and owned by the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Fortunately, BLM was amenable to a swap and Congress approved, so today, guests at the 34-suite resort gaze out at sweeping views of the rock formations in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. (www.amanresorts.com)

I was prepared to be impressed. Aman resorts consistently top the lists compiled by *Zagat*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, and others who rank worldwide lodgings. However, even expecting something special, my first view literally took my breath away, and I remained in this semi-heady condition throughout my stay.



In addition to this breakfast buffet, chefs at Amangiri are happy to prepare guests' special requests



Amangiri resort is built around the main swimming pool and affords panoramic views of the surrounding rugged landscape



The Colorado River makes a 300-degree turn at Horseshoe Bend near Page, Arizona — less than 30 minutes south of Amangiri

The approach to the resort is down a long, winding road with expanses of desert and huge sandstone boulders on both sides. The rocks, sculpted by wind for millions of years, resemble pieces of modern art. By contrast, the style of the buildings is minimalist and rectilinear, as if not wanting to compete with the natural terrain. Huge floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room, dining room, and all guest suites frame picture-postcard vistas. Gas fireplaces throughout the resort take the chill off cool evenings, while numerous contemporary water features seem to cool the days.

Since I was traveling alone, I was delighted to see an inviting counter in front of the open

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➤ kitchen where I could (and did) meet other travelers and chat with chefs over meals.

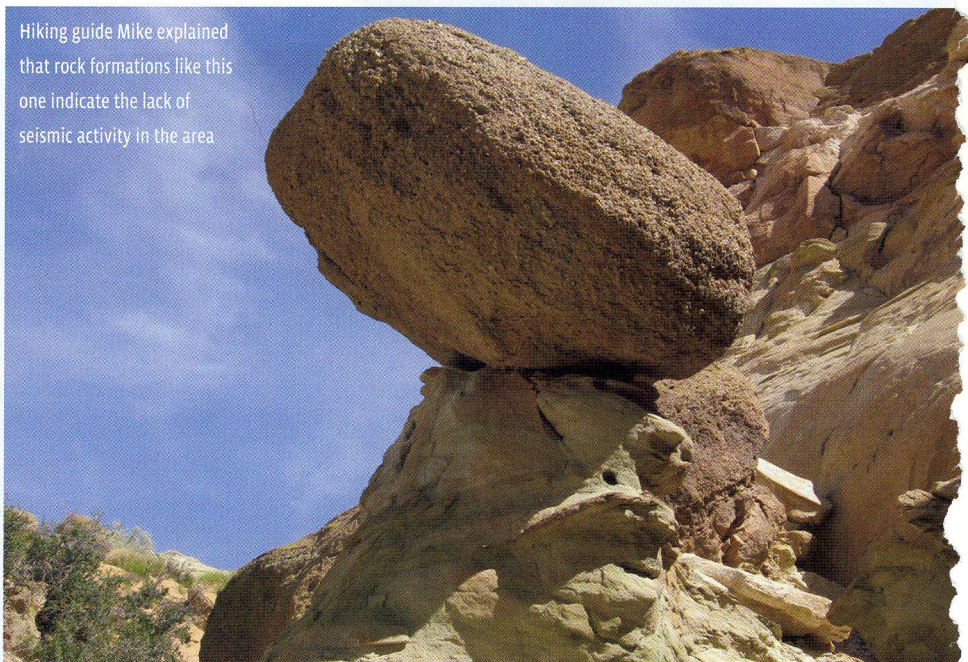
“How long is dinner served?” I inquired upon arrival.

“Until the last guest has eaten,” replied a staff member. “Sometimes that means midnight when there are late arrivals.”

The next morning I joined three other women and a guide on the Hoodoo Trail, named for the phallic formations of Entrada sandstone and Dakota rock we passed along the way. We walked on slickrock and sand, pausing to drink in the spiritual energy of the area and to photograph profusions of wildflowers, as well as gorgeous views of mountains shaped like Buddhist shrines, flat-topped mesas, and reclining quadrupeds. The one-hour “tasting hike” turned into a three-hour outing because we were having so much fun.

Many guests use Amangiri as a base for touring Bryce Canyon National Park, Staircase-Escalante, and Zion National

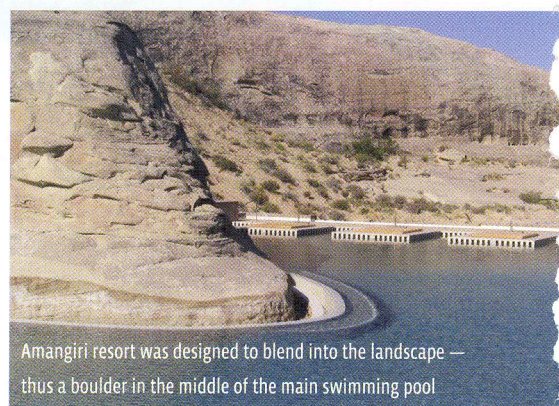
Hiking guide Mike explained that rock formations like this one indicate the lack of seismic activity in the area



Park. Personally, I was disinclined to leave the resort for even a minute, but my yen to see Lake Powell and the Colorado River’s Horseshoe Bend got the better of me, and I asked for my car — which thoughtfully arrived with the A/C running and cold bottles of water at hand. “It’s the Aman way,” was the explanation.

My excursion to the scenic spots was worth the effort, but when I came “home” I headed for the Amangiri Spa and stayed there as long as I could. This area includes five candlelit treatment rooms, two outdoor treatment pavilions, the Yoga Pavilion, the Fitness Center, the Water Pavilion, and the Flotation Pool. Amangiri spa experiences reflect elements of the Navajo culture and healing traditions. Treatments are designed to restore “hozho,” which in Navajo means “beauty, harmony, balance, and health.”

At first I thought I’d have a Thai massage because the pavilions for that purpose are literally steps from the desert and have a great



Amangiri resort was designed to blend into the landscape — thus a boulder in the middle of the main swimming pool

view of sandstone boulders. However, in the end, I opted for the “Twilight Journey,” which includes a hot stone massage and 30 minutes of flotation therapy.

It had been a long day of hiking and sightseeing, but as I floated in the dark surrounded by 98-degree water and air, I went into a meditative state and awoke feeling rested — and with my hozho fully restored.

For “Getting There” and “Adventure” options, as well as “If You Go” tips, please visit www.ranchandcoast.com.

ELIZABETH HANSEN

This Navajo Yucca is one of many wildflowers that grow on the 600-acre Amangiri property

