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A WET 'N' WILD GRAND CANYON ADVENTURE

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BLAME IT ON RIO

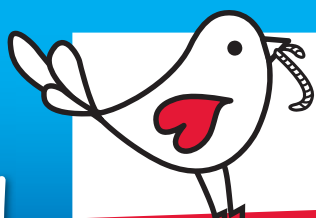
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the rim – which is like a wet roller-coaster ride.

The temperature in July hovers in the mid to high 40s, but the water is 10C year-round thanks to Glen Canyon hydro-electric dam.

Just as it starts to get too hot, we hit a rapid and cool off with a shock of cold water.

Fifteen companies offer commercial

trips through the canyon and you also can go into a lottery to do private trips.

At one point we pass paddlers in a small wooden boat and ask what it is like going through the rapids in it.

“It’s like going through a washing machine with a hose in your mouth,” one of them replies.

Day four is waterfall day, and we visit several waterfalls.

At Shinamu Falls, we waded through a rocky creek to a small but powerful waterfall, in which you can climb through a tunnel cave behind and jump into the cascading water.

The second, the appropriately named Elves Chasm, is so pretty it’s like something from *Lord of the Rings*.

Deer Creek is a tall, thundering waterfall, where we drench ourselves

before hiking up the canyon to see the beautiful view of the river slithering through the gorge.

We have the choice to continue to yet another desert oasis, but Evan warns us it involves a sideways face-against-rock climb over a thin ledge overlooking a canyon, and those with a fear of heights shouldn’t attempt it. “If you fall, you will die,” he says.

It turns out to not be as bad as it sounds and on the other side we find another group of pools with another small waterfall.

At Havasu Falls, another limestone wonderland with turquoise water, we take turns to jump from a 2m high rock – even 73-year-old retiree Leon.

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Rafting Grand Canyon



Go2 GRAND CANYON

Getting there

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15 Nov 2011

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Jerry, who previously ran a rehabilitation hospital for people with spinal and head injuries, looks on in quiet horror.

Each afternoon, Evan chooses a beach on the river that will be our camp for the night. After we are given a chance to choose a campsite, Evan calls “fireline” and we form a human chain to unload gear from the boats.

Some people pitch tents, but I opt to sleep on my cot under the stars – and just hope it doesn’t rain.

I wake one night to see the moon emerging from behind the canyon and illuminate the night sky.

Another night I see a shooting star. Two toilets are set up at camp – one in a small tent and another out in the open beside the river, where you just cross your fingers and hope another boat doesn’t go past. If it does, Evan’s advice is to smile and wave.

Meals are cooked on a barbecue beside the river and one of the guides blows a conch shell to let us know when it is ready.

After dinner some nights Evan reads us a “bedtime story” – fascinating tales about such things as two crazy guys who swam the river and a mystery about two honeymooners who went missing there in the 1920s.

It doesn’t rain while we are there but apparently, when it does, the muddy water flowing down the canyon walls makes it look like Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory.

The guides constantly surprise us. Before one particularly hot hike, Evan pulls out a bag of chocolate bars and another night they bring out icecream dessert to go with guide Johnny’s birthday cake.

They tell us it was dropped in by helicopter while we were sleeping (and some people actually believe them).

On the last night they dress up in collared shirts and ties and serve prawn cocktails before barbecuing fish, which we joke is the endangered humpback chub.

After dinner, guide Scotty plays his guitar and harmonica and sings songs he has written about the river and his other great love, sailing. It is extremely moving and I see more than one person wipe tears from their eyes.



BEAUTY SPOT: Rafting down the Colorado (top); and lovely Elves Chasm waterfall (above).

Pictures: Western River Expeditions, Angela Saurine

But there is still one more class 10 rapid to go – the dreaded Lava Falls – on the final morning.

It turns out I had every reason to fear it. At one point I see a monster 6m wave bearing down towards me, knowing there is nothing I can do to stop it.

I am in a relatively safe spot on top of the coolers, but down the front it is chaos.

The force of the wave has caused super-fit Leon to lose his grip on the ropes and he is hugging the front of the tube. Our guide, Matt, jumps on top of him to save him from falling overboard.

About halfway through the rapid I notice 18-year-old Oliver, from England, is holding the back of his neck in pain after being flung backwards.

To our relief he can move his fingers and toes, but we pull in to shore and call a rescue helicopter on the satellite phone to airlift him to hospital, just in case.

Evan tells us he has had to airlift five people out in his 14 years’ guiding on the river, and three have been this year – something he attributes to the 10-year-high water levels.

Fortunately, Oliver is released from hospital the next day with only minor injuries, but it is a reminder that rafting the mighty Colorado River definitely isn’t Dreamworld.

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