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Hotel review: Trailborn Grand Canyon, Arizona

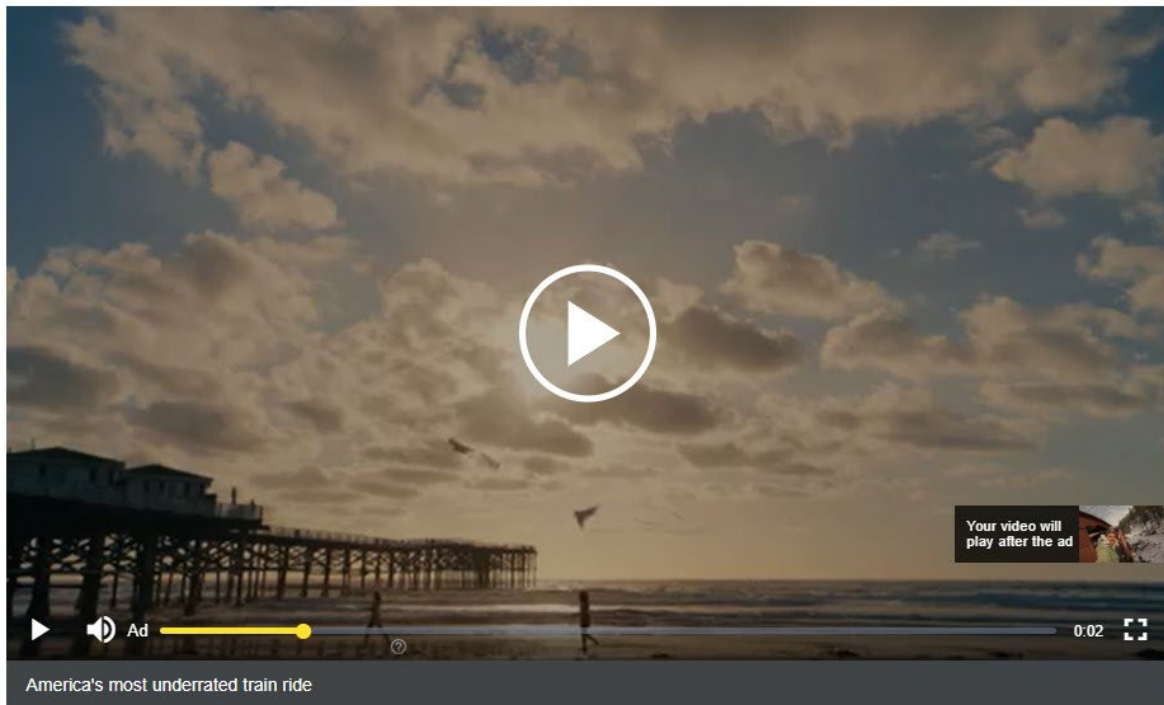
A new hotel, Trailborn has just opened in the town of Williams, the gateway to the Grand Canyon. And they have had some fun with it.

**Andrea Black**

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Forget what you may have read about Route 66 being a 'ghost highway'.

In this part of Arizona the famed road that winds from Chicago to LA is thriving so much that hip hoteliers have taken note. A new hotel, [Trailborn](#) has just opened in the town of Williams, the gateway to the Grand Canyon. And they have had some fun with it. This fully redesigned and renovated hotel (once the Thunderbird Inn) on Route 66 comes with a saloon-style Camp Hall and an indoor/outdoor restaurant and bar.

Location



The Trailborn Grand Canyon. Image: Christian Harder

Never heard of the town of Williams in Arizona? There's good reason why it should now be on your radar with the upcoming centennial celebrations of Route 66 in 2026. This is also the gateway town to one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, the Grand Canyon. It's home to the Grand Canyon Railway, a daily service that travels straight to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, the most popular entry point to the park.



Checking in at the Trailborn Grand Canyon. Picture: Christian Harder

This is not just a town filled with vintage diners, old school bars and delightfully cheesy gift shops with Elvis fortune-telling machines and cowboy gear. There is also a good dose of newer businesses from breweries and a wine tasting room to the Canyon Coaster Adventure Park right next door to the hotel. It all makes for an enticing road trip combo. Williams is a 2.5 hour drive from Phoenix, a 30-minute drive from Flagstaff and a 3 hour drive from Las Vegas.

The vibe



The welcoming hotel lobby. Picture: Christian Harder

It's all about laidback southwestern charm here. Guests are greeted with a welcoming Topo Chico sparkling water in the lobby which has all the hallmarks of a superbly done renovation that would appeal to any design fan. Think: warm curved woods, a yellow-tiled fireplace, a comfy couch under a beautiful vintage tapestry and a record player with Willie Nelson on the turntable. The interior designers took inspiration from the American West with fresh takes on classic 'old west' landscapes. And the neon sign and playful touches such as framed scenes from the past pays tribute to the retro motels of the mid-century days of Route 66.

The room



A room at Trailborn Grand Canyon. Picture: Christian Harder

There are 96 rooms, my room looks out to the new pool and spa, and is a short walk away from the outdoor firepit. It's immediately clear that this hotel has good bones with high ceilings and enough room to move in the bathroom. The feel? Warm and inviting. There's a velvet headboard, leather-stitched lamps, southwestern throw rugs, and soft lighting. Add to this a Tivoli Bluetooth radio to tune into songs from the road. The bathrooms feature Grown Alchemist amenities, there's even a cooler bag should you wish to take a picnic in the Grand Canyon.

Food and drinks



Gather fireside with marshmallows at the Trailborn.

Let's start with the s'mores. A kit filled with marshmallows, biscuits, chocolate and sticks is presented at check-in, and come evening, guests can gather fireside to melt the marshmallows for this taste sensation, best done after a meal at the onsite steak house Miss Kittys, where your choice of cut is grilled to order. There's indoor and outdoor seating, and a bar as well. They were just setting up on my visit but come summer this will be the perfect perch for their planned brunches. Within short walking distance are tacos from hole-in-the-wall restaurant Nany's, hot breakfasts at Goldies Route 66 Diner, scratch-made (a word used a lot around these parts) Key Lime pie at Pine Country and great pizzas at Italian restaurant Station 66.

Activities



The Camp Hall at Trailborn.

The gloriously named Camp Hall serves as the social hub of the hotel where there's live music, darts, shuffleboard, movie nights and even wild west bingo. Alfresco, as well as the pool and spa there's bocce and cornhole, and outdoor speakers playing classic bangers as well as indie tunes. Trailborn offers free use of bikes and there's also off-site experiences they can organise led by local guides including helicopter rides, hikes in the Grand Canyon and astrophotography and stargazing, this area is renowned for its dark skies. Add to this the fact that The Historic Route 66 Association of Arizona will be hosting a plethora of events along the route in celebration of the centennial including fun runs, car shows and concerts.

What's hot



Onsite steak house Miss Kittys, where your choice of cut is grilled to order.

Trailborn has a 'Keep Extraordinary' initiative where a portion of every room booking goes to the Grand Canyon Conservancy with a focus on wildlife protection and trail restoration.

What's not

Yes, there is in-room coffee but for Aussie tastes it might not be strong enough. Expect to hunt down a second or third helping.

The verdict: 9/10

The price alone makes this hip hotel worth seeking out, and the fact you can park your car right in front of your room, old-school-motel-style. Add to this the location, a great base for Grand Canyon and Route 66 explorations.

The writer was a guest of Trailborn Grand Canyon and Visit Arizona. Rooms for US\$119 a night.



Andrea Black
Travel writer

When she's not travelling the world on a cruise ship, music-loving Andrea can be found searching for additions to her record collection in New York or LA. She once sat next to '90s Maxi Priest on a flight, and has her sights set on a trip to Mexico City – and cruising on Viking Orion.

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